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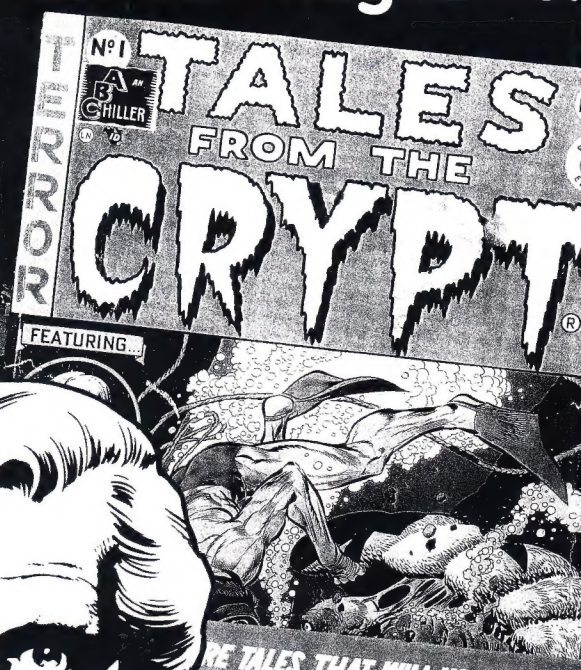

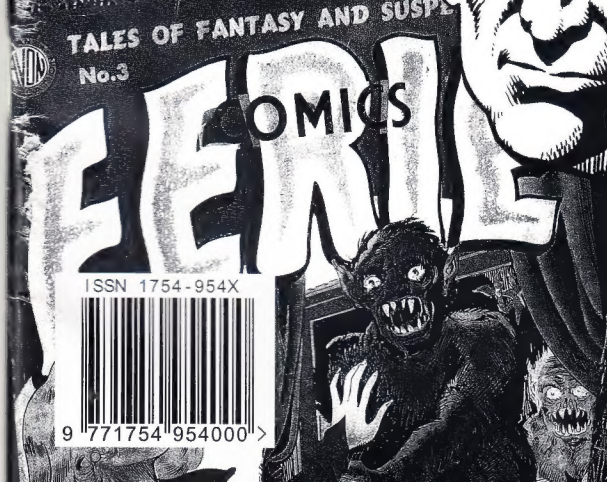

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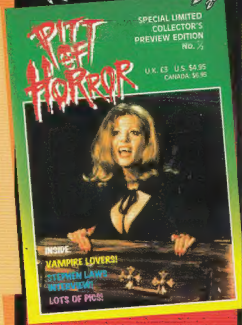

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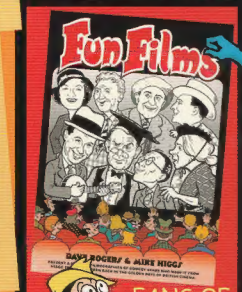

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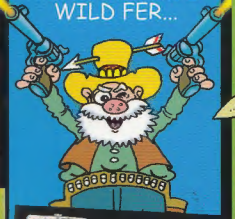

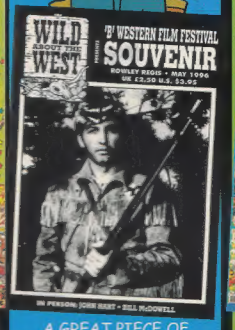
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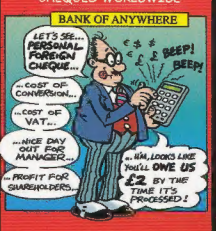
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Crikey! Editorial

Brian M Clarke *Editor* **Glenn B Fleming** *Designer* **Tom Sweetman** *Publicist*

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Stephen Poppitt traces the history of one of the best TVSF titles of the Seventies.

Um Letters **46-48**
Your views on *Crikey!*, British comics and whatever else takes your fancy. Plus the beginnings of what might prove to be some interesting fan discussions.

Crikey! chums...

I'm reminded of a comment made by Glenn – fellow *Crikey!* Chum and designer of our lovely pages. We had just received printed copies of issue one and were staring at it in almost disbelief. We'd been working on-and-off to get it published for the past two years and now we were holding a weighty copy with that just-printed smell.

We were getting all misty-eyed as we flicked through the pages, when Glenn dropped a challenge – "You know, in a couple of issues we'll be so far ahead of this that we'll be slightly embarrassed by it".

Glenn could already see the areas of improvement ahead and although we never even approached being embarrassed by our first issue (it's a first class attempt) we have never lost faith in where we want to take *Crikey!* More pages. Better paper. Colour pages. Slowly but surely, we're getting there and it's the reactions from fans and casual readers alike who are giving us the confidence to push ourselves to the max.

The reaction to *Crikey!* over the past several months has been overwhelming. Tom, Glenn and myself have gone from three fans working alone on a pet project to being in charge of something that really appears to have taken fandom by storm. It seems that almost every day someone new gets in touch with offers of collections that they can scan for us, articles to write or to provide transcripts of interviews.

Just compare the Writers' this issue... section from *Crikey!* 3 and 4. Not only do we have new writers (always welcomed) but we've even managed to get our very own fact-checker. Welcome aboard, Ray – we'll try to keep you busy checking stuff against the piles of reference works you have worked on over the years.

Furthermore, we are increasingly recognised by British comics professionals as the magazine to be seen in. We were really pleased when the amazing Dave Gibbons agreed to let us in on his Comicy Saturday Morning as part of our regular feature looking at how we grew up with the comics. Knowing that we have the support of people like Dave behind us makes all the hard work worthwhile.

The other great news for us (but not our home lives) is our decision to move from quarterly to a bi-monthly schedule. It means an extra two issues a year and allows us to make our subscription offer even better (see inside back cover for details).

British comics has a lot to offer fans and judging by the list of ideas and sample articles we are receiving I really can say; the best is yet to come.

Cheers,
Brian

Crikey! Chums of the Month are Pete Nichols and Phil Slatterley for providing some great images in our hour of need.

Writers this issue:
Tony Ingram, Jenni Scott, Mike Morley, Dave Gibbons, Bob Norton, Glenn B Fleming, David Robinson, Steve Holland, Brian M Clarke, Stephen Poppit.

Fact checking::
Ray Moore, Nigel Parkinson.

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Note: *The closing date for booking ads for issue five is 5 May 2008.*

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Nutty Notions

Each issue of *Crikey!* features a selection of some of the lovingly bizarre concepts that have graced the pages of British comics in the years past. This time round *Tony Ingram* proves that he has read way too many comics in his time... *Ideas and nominations for future Nutty Notions gratefully accepted through the* Crikey! *website (*www.crikeyuk.co.uk*), click 'contact' and away you go! Enjoy!*

The Day of the Giant (Victor 1975)
Art: Ted Rawlings

The 'giant' in question was a huge –and I do mean huge – toad. Hero Ben Gardner discovered that its poison contained a cure for radiation sickness (!).

Cue lines like "I had to try to save the toad from the nuclear bomb; the secret of the poison in its warts could save thousands of lives."

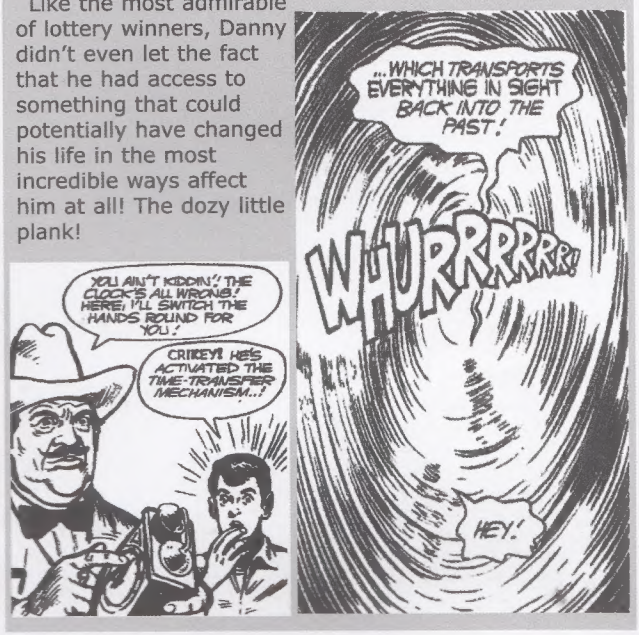
Do I really need to go on?

Danny Jones, Time Traveller (Hurricane 1965)
Art: Various artists

'Danny Jones possessed a fantastic old clock which could switch him back into the past.'

Well, of course he did. Doesn't everyone. Actually, as with a lot of these old sixties and seventies strips about kids with amazing gadgets, the most noteworthy things about Danny Jones, Time Traveller is not that he could travel through time just by winding back his clock, but that he was so totally unfazed by it.

Like the most admirable of lottery winners, Danny didn't even let the fact that he had access to something that could potentially have changed his life in the most incredible ways affect him at all! The dozy little plank!


...WHICH TRANSPORTS EVERYTHING IN SIGHT BACK INTO THE PAST!
WHURRRRRR!
HEY!
YOU AIN'T KIDDIN'! THE CLOCK'S ALL WRONG! HERE! I'LL SWITCH THE HANDS ROUND FOR YOU!
CRIKEY! HE'S ACTIVATED THE TIME-TRANSFER MECHANISM...!

Glasses of Glory (Victor 1977)
Art: Geoffrey Whittam

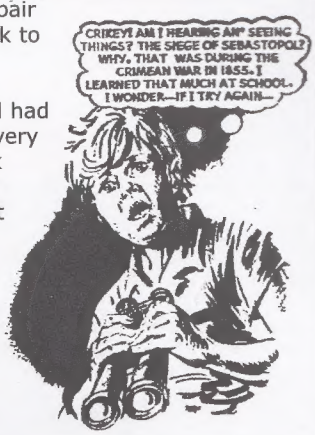
Young Charlie King was an ordinary kid, until he accidentally discovered a pair of field glasses dating back to the Crimean War.

These were no ordinary binoculars, though; they'd had an exciting history, and every time Charlie (who, as luck would have it, is clued up about military history) put them to his eyes, he was able to view another chunk of the baffling bins' 'experiences'.

Educational? Certainly.

Barking mad?

Quite possibly – but the art was nice.


CRIKEY! AM I HEARING AN' SEEING THINGS? THE SIEGE OF SEBASTOPOL? WHY, THAT WAS DURING THE CRIMEAN WAR IN 1855. I LEARNED THAT MUCH AT SCHOOL. I WONDER—IF I TRY AGAIN—

The Juggernaut from Planet Z (Hurricane 1964)
Art: Various artists

What do you do if the Earth is endangered by mad scientists, volcanic eruptions or other sinister disasters too big for conventional forces to deal with?

Well, if you're the Global Protection Headquarters in London, there's only one option open to you: You call in Dan Morgan, 'Scientist extraordinary', and Dan will, in turn, summon ... The Juggernaut from Planet Z.

The Juggernaut was a mysterious, incredibly powerful but curiously clunky-looking robot which was quite capable of thinking and acting for itself.

It carried passengers, too, so wily old Dan could safely take all the credit for its actions! Not that he would ...

CRIKEY! THE 'COPTER CREW HAVE GUNS, AND THEY'RE DRAGGING OUT PROFESSOR BAMFORTH! THEY MUST BE KIDNAPPING HIM!
TOMMY, YOU DRANK SOME INKY-TOP WATER, AND IT MAKES YOU ABLE TO RUN LIKE A DEER. DOESN'T IT? GET HELP!
SURE, TUBBY! I'M ON MY WAY!

The Inky Top Imps (Topper 1970s)
Art: Sandy Calder

'In the village of Arkside, in Arkdale, live six close chums, Tommy Armitage, Jenny Bamforth, Charlie Cluff, Zoe Oldroyd, Tubby Butterworth and Lanky Reeves.

The youngsters have a secret hide-out in a cave high on Inky Top Hill and so they call themselves the Inky Top Imps.'

Hardly an introductory paragraph to inspire confidence that amazing adventures and daring exploits were to come, but the Imps had more going for them than a damp den and a sissy-sounding sobriquet.

Their cave contained a magic spring, the waters of which bestowed awesome powers on the drinker; Lanky could leap like a kangaroo, for instance, while Charlie gained super-strength.

It's a testament to the kids' self-restraint that, while never found wanting when the inevitable crooks and ne-er do wells turned up, their principle use of the remarkable water was to wash down their freshly caught fish!

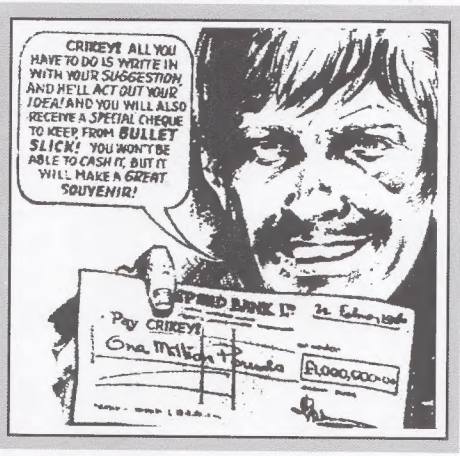
The £1,000,000 Challenge (Speed 1980)
Art: Eric Bradbury to begin, then uknown

Bullet Slick was a millionaire in love with Speed, until an accident left him in a wheelchair. Embittered at having never achieved his dream of being recognised as the fastest man on Earth, the arrogant Bullet issued a challenge to the readers of Speed the comic: dream up an idea for some speedy stunt that would impress him and you'd receive a cheque for £1,000,000.

Unfortunately, it wasn't a real cheque (aww), but Bullet would also pay 'up to five pounds each week' for the winning idea, in real money!

None of which would have come as much consolation to his long-suffering assistant, Wiley, who'd invariably end up testing out ludicrous inventions like the Cheetah Beater (stand up, master David Carroll, of London).

Naturally, Bullet was never impressed with the results, so he'd usually end up ordering Wiley to pay the fiver out of his own pocket for his failures – the stingy old misery!


CRIKEY! ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS WRITE IN WITH YOUR SUGGESTION, AND HE'LL ACT OUT YOUR IDEA! AND YOU WILL ALSO RECEIVE A SPECIAL CHEQUE TO KEEP FROM BULLET SLICK! YOU WON'T BE ABLE TO CASH IT, BUT IT WILL MAKE A GREAT SOUVENIR!
Pay CRIKEY!
One Million Pounds
£1,000,000

The Last Six Hundred (Victor 1965, reprinted 1975)
Art: Jean Marie

'By 2065, Britain and the rest of the world had been overgrown by a giant fern which, though poisonous to humans, made animals and plants grow to many times their normal size. Six hundred people living on Portland Island believed themselves to be the last people alive'. Of course, they weren't but by the time we found that out, a generation of kids would never look at a fern in the same way again.

Our Sheriff's an Ape (Beezer Annuals and Summer Specials)
Art: Bill Holroyd and Bill Hill

Okay, Coyote Creek is, at first glance, your average Wild West town, prospering under the watchful eye of Sheriff Danny Blain. No surprises there. But Coyote Creek actually had two sheriffs, and the other one is ... an ape, named Charlie.

You'd be forgiven for wondering what kind of nitwits would accept placing themselves under the jurisdiction of an officer of the law several rungs down the evolutionary ladder. Charlie seems to have been something of a hit with the law-abiding citizens of this strange little town, however, judging by how long the strip ran.

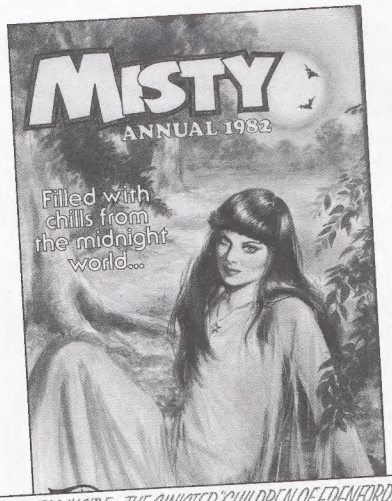
The really odd thing is the way Charlie fits in so well with the rest of the town folk!

Jenni spoke at the Aesthetics of Trash Culture conference held in Manchester last summer. Her paper went down very well and in the discussion later I was able to convince Jenni to produce a version for Crikey! readers. Remember: it was originally written for egg-heads …

Misty Jinty Tammy

Female identities and socialisation in the 1970s wave of British girls' comics

By Jenni Scott



MEET THEM INSIDE...THE SINISTER 'CHILDREN OF EDENFORD'!
Jinty
Hailed as a Goddess!
"I'm going to fall!"
Danger threatens the PRISONER OF THE BELL!

If you are in your thirties or older, you will probably remember having a weekly comic delivered to your door or kept for you at the local newsagents. If you are younger than that, chances are that you will have missed out on this so thoroughly that you may not even know what I'm referring to – the grand tradition of the British weekly comic, a staple of life in the second half of the 20th century.

British comics were read by both girls and boys in huge numbers during the second half of the 20th century, with constantly proliferating numbers of weekly titles published for each gender.

The titles marketed at girls were a noticeably different group from those marketed to boys, both in the sorts of names used and in the focus of the stories. With no real overlap, overwhelmingly the kinds of stories published were separated by gender: boys' comics featured war and action stories, and girls' comics featured stories of pop music and (for older girls) romance. Many featured schoolgirl ballerinas, horseriders, or simply schoolfriends.

Changes

Today, that variety of titles available contrasts strongly with the very small numbers available on current newsstands – a mere handful, restricted to a tiny bit of shelf space and surrounded by similar-looking items that are vehicles for licensed characters. Sustained stories are vanishingly rare if present at all.

The one area in which a broader swathe of publishing remains is in the under-7s market, but otherwise at present comics can be more readily seen on the shelves of bookstores than in newsagents .

Print runs of that time also stand in stark contrast to today's print runs. The launch of monthly title *BeanoMAX* in 2007 has seen an initial print run of 120,000; whereas, to take one example of the print runs common in the 60s and 70s, IPC's *Tammy* sold in the order of a quarter of a million per week, with some titles being taken off the newsstands even though they were selling approximately 200,000 per week.

I will be focusing on those comics aimed specifically at girls, and particularly at three titles published by IPC (or Fleetway, as it was then) – the long-running Tammy (into which the other two titles eventually merged), Jinty, and Misty.

'Old Skool' girls' stories

The image many people have of the stereotypical girls' comic is that it features stories that are bland rather than exciting, and perhaps stifling rather than liberating. Typically people would expect stories about horse-riding, boarding schools, ballet – to include plucky schoolgirls defeating villains, true, but all in a very stiff-upper-lip kind of way. The obvious key example here is *Bunty*, the long-running predecessor and survivor of the main three comics under discussion here.

Looking at *Bunty*'s 'The Four Marys' would hardly disabuse a reader of this impression – it sits squarely in the middle class boarding school genre, with Marys Cotter, Field, Radleigh, and Simpson involved in stories fitting directly into the milieu inhabited by Enid Blyton. A synopsis of a story from 1959 reads:

'After the daring rescue of Miss Johnson, the hermit, from a

Bella
Gymnast Bella Barlow had been told that she'd left the sport after hurting her back, but the truth was that following a poor performance, she'd stalked out of the arena and had an accident in which she lost her memory. Her Uncle Jed capitalised on this and convinced Bella that she now worked for him as a window cleaner. While on her rounds, Bella met Jenny, a keen young gymnast whom she had now been reunited with her sister and her foster parents. But, on hearing about her disappointing final appearance, Bella had lost confidence in her ability...
Written by: Malcolm Shaw
Drawn by: John Armstrong
I'M FINISHED. I'M ONLY GOOD FOR CLEANING WINDOWS NOW. I'M GLAD THINGS HAVE WORKED OUT FOR YOU, JENNY. MAKE SURE YOU JOIN A GYM CLUB, EH?
YES, BUT YOU'RE GOING TO BE ON TOP AGAIN, BELLA - YOU ARE!
LET'S GO HOME.
BELLA...!
SHE SHOULD STILL SEE A DOCTOR, JED!
NO! SHE'LL BE ALL RIGHT.
So Bella gave up all ideas of a sporting comeback...
IT'S NOT RIGHT. BELLA SHOULD AT LEAST BE COACHING.
BUT SHE COULD STILL BE WINNING COMPETITIONS.
Bella's friends were not prepared to give up without a fight...
THIS IS BELLA'S OLD COACH, JENNY. BUT BELLA WON'T EVEN SEE HIM.
SHE'S NOT FINISHED. HER TERRIBLE LAST PERFORMANCE WAS DUE TO EXHAUSTION. SHE'D BEEN DOING TOO MANY EXHIBITIONS AND TOURNAMENTS. BUT SHE WON'T ACCEPT THAT, AND HER CONFIDENCE HAS GIVEN WAY COMPLETELY.
SO WHAT CAN WE DO?
WE HAVE TO MANOEUVRE HER INTO A POSITION WHERE SHE HAS TO PERFORM AGAIN. AND SINCE SHE THINKS THE WORLD OF YOU, JENNY, I NEED YOUR HELP.
A month later...
C'MON, BELLA – GET A MOVE ON. THIS IS A SPECIAL JOB. COULD LEAD TO A BIG CONTRACT. THEY WANT THE WORK DONE NOW. EVEN PAID ME IN ADVANCE!
OH, ALL RIGHT. BUT IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE MY DAY OFF!
THE TOWN SPORTS CENTRE! I THOUGHT THE COUNCIL HAD THEIR OWN WINDOW CLEANERS, OR SOME BIG FIRM DID IT. I'LL BE HERE ALL DAY!

treacherous marsh, the Four Marys and the rest of the search party prepared to return to St Elmo's. The quaint old woman was in a dazed condition after her frightening experience.'

Comparing this to another Four Marys story from 1999, it is clear that not much has changed apart from the art style and other superficial details:

'The Four Marys, Cotter, Field, Radleigh and Simpson, friends at St Elmo's School for Girls, had discovered that a girl band, B True, who had bought property nearby, were being cheated by the agent, Jed Upton.'

Likewise, *Bunty* features its fair share of stories about ballerinas ('Lorna Drake', 'The Dancing Life of Moira Kent', 'The Phantom Ballerina' to name a few), sports ('Margie The Swimming Marvel'), nurses ('Katy O'Connor, Student Nurse'), and animals ('Selma's Sanctuary').

Despite these stories arguably 'living down' to expectations in terms of themes, they have remained extremely memorable over many years for those women who initially read the comic as girls:

'It is a pity young girls don't read comics anymore - I certainly saw some of the heroines as role models and was inspired by their adventures' – Jennifer

'I am 56 years old, living in Brisbane Australia, and can vividly remember when Bunty first came out. ... I still have my happy memories' - Joan Fitches

'Just wanted to say that I am now 47 and Bunty was the 'fave' among me and my friends at about the age of 11-12. LOVED seeing it on your site - thought it was all but forgotten.' – Jopacey

Mandy from DC Thomson is similar in tone, featuring stories about horses, girl guiding, and the lives of various ordinary schoolgirls ('Penny's Place'). It also lasted a long time – over 24 years.

Creating and publishing girls' stories: the commercial context in Tammy, Jinty, Misty

The titles above, and other older comics or story titles such as *Girl* (the counterpart to the squeaky-clean boys' paper *The Eagle*) and *Mirabelle* (geared towards pop music and boyfriends), form the context in which the three titles under discussion were launched.

Like the more 'old skool' titles, *Tammy*, *Jinty*, and *Misty* have a number of features typical of British girls' comics of the time. The cover is brightly coloured, but the printing is on low-quality paper and there would normally be at most one other colour used in the inside pages. Each issue prints three or four pages of an ongoing story, where the whole story is told in around 10 – 14 weeks, with approximately seven different stories in each weekly publication.

Not all the stories are serialised parts of a whole – comedy stories, in particular, may have no overall storyline. These may be very short, perhaps only one page long, as a 'filler' item. Other fillers may be advice pages, crafts pages, letters pages, horoscopes, or 'storyteller' reprints from earlier years or other comics.

Woman's world

The stories themselves very nearly always feature a girl as the main character, possibly with some important male characters included . Generally they are set in a predominantly-female environment (such as an all-girls' school and even quite general environments such as a village are depicted as mostly female).

The character, and her special trait or background, is usually referred to directly in the title – 'Wee Slavey' for a hard-done-by Victorian maid-of-all-work, 'Bella At The Bar' for a gymnast, 'Left-Out Linda' for a girl who feels left out by her changing family circumstances, and so forth.

These characteristics are clearly linked to the commercial nature of the work. An intriguing and yet normally fairly explanatory title for each of various ongoing stories ending in a cliff-hanger week by week, with a colour cover allowing for promotion of the most successful story and possibly a free gift (particularly in the launch weeks of a new comic).

The characters are easy for the female readership to identify with, but with their own special characteristics that make the story exciting to read.

During this time, comics were made in something of a production-line atmosphere. Writers and artists were not credited (though by this time various artists had started to take to signing stories in inconspicuous locations, or in ways that would be difficult to remove). Individual recognition was normally suppressed. Artists in particular might well never meet other artists or the writers on their stories (though editors could often be writing stories as well as editing the comic).

Pat Mills, editorial creator of seminal boys' comics *2000AD* and *Action*, spoke about his involvement in the early days of *Tammy*, *Jinty*, and *Misty* in a 2004 interview held at the *CAPTION Convention*. The commercial pressures could, paradoxically, lead to a creative silver lining:

'... on another level, they [girls' comics] were very good for similar reasons to Charley's War in a way. They're on crap paper, it's a cheap-looking publication, so it's got to be good!'

Getting the best

Given the limited resources in publishing terms, it was crucial to get both 'great stories and superb artwork' and to keep a very close eye on the popularity index of the stories:

'...you had these popularity polls, often little boxes on the readers' page, and the readers would write-in which three strips they liked most – and sometimes, too, the one they liked least. ... the editor ... had graphs, with different coloured lines – they took it all that seriously!'

In the same interview, he is candid about the use of formulas in producing these stories:

'...We actually would sit down and say, when we were constructing a girls' comic or revising an existing one, 'Right, let's have the slave story', and the reason was because they were so popular with the readers! ... we would have a slave story, what we called a Cinderella story, where the heroine's down on her luck. We'd have a friendship story'.

The reason for these formulas was a pragmatic one:

'Sometimes that formula didn't work, but most of the time it did... I'll give a couple of examples of when it didn't work, which really shows the difference between the sexes.

'Mystery stories – girls, love mystery stories. Say a school where there's a mysterious headmistress, and girls are disappearing, and other girls are turning up in the dormitory - this gets them going! And the explanation can be complete crap, and it usually was, and it doesn't matter!

'We tried this with male readers, we only did it once, and they hated it! That was 'Terror Beyond the Bamboo Curtain'... You could see the thinking; we had the sadistic Japanese commander of the prisoner-of-war camp, and prisoners are disappearing, and strange things are going on, and the readers *did not care!* They weren't bothered about the mystery, they just wanted to see the action! What was the Terror Behind the Bamboo Curtain? Who cares, bring on the violence! A female readership, even if you've got a mystery as simple as 'What's inside that box?', that'll keep them going for weeks! It's a fundamental difference between the sexes.'

On the British comics website 26pigs.com, fan and expert Briony Coote has produced a very thorough

Example story: 'The Children of Edenford'

The range of stories published over the approximately twenty-four combined years of the existence of these three comics obviously cannot be easily reproduced or summarised here. One particularly mad story must be the stand-in for all the other stories that deadline pressures, external cultural influences, and cynical young men produced over those years.

'The Children of Edenford' is the ultimate in anti-establishment thought. The main character, Patti, moves to the small village of Edenford when her father gets a new job – although it is very pretty and her parents love it (it is green, tidy, and very bourgeois), Patti hates it because the other children act strangely – in fact, they are too perfect to be true: 'But Mum ... it's not natural to be as good as they are!'

Her fears are soon realised when, along with her friend, Jilly, they discover that the headmistress (Purity Goodfellow) is feeding her pupils a mystic drug discovered in India – a drug to make them perfect! This drug makes the schoolgirls into paragons (oddly, they seem to be all girls in the village – at least as far as can be seen in the story). They make ballgowns for their mothers and gourmet packed lunches for their fathers, do maths homework voluntarily, and tear down their pop posters ('Oh, I took them down. You know, pop music is a waste of time. It neither enriches the soul nor challenges the intellect.')

After finding the cure to this drug ('My hay fever has symptoms like a cold ... and somehow streaming eyes and sneezes break down the conditioning that makes everyone so perfect') and many struggles against this imposed status quo, a show-down with the frighteningly insane-looking headmistress results. 'Prepare yourself for the temple of purity! The fire of righteousness there shall burn out your imperfections!'

In the end it is down to Patti, by herself, to fight back. (Even the parents have been turned into zombies – or as Miss Goodfellow says, 'Zombies! You dare call them zombies? They are model citizens ... hard working, conscientious, kind, caring.')

In front of the large sacrificial pit that has been installed in the headmistress's inner sanctum, Purity Goodfellow intones solemnly: 'Behold the flames of purity ... you shall give yourself up to them!' Patti replies: 'Not without a struggle, I won't!' In the ensuing melée, the headmistress is knocked into her own sacrificial pit, and dies refusing help from Patti's hands. In the last panel Patti stands next to her friend Jilly and says 'In a few days, we'll be like every other village ... a mixture of good and bad. Edenford will be just human again!'

list of Common Categories For Serials In Girls' Comics, which gives many further examples of formulas .

Viva la difference

It isn't the use or non-use of formulas that makes *Tammy*, *Jinty*, and *Misty* different from other story papers of the time. Talking about the editor of *Jinty*, Mills clarified that there was a deliberate intent to make these titles work differently:

'Basically, you had an old regime, very stuck in their ways. And this applied right across the board, to humour comics – which I also wrote for – they were totally stuck in their ways, and Mavis [Miller], to her great credit, adapted from *June* and *School Friend*, which was somewhat old-fashioned, into the new style of thinking that we were all trying for, to upgrade stories for a new generation.'

The new style of thinking focused particularly on an anti-establishment message, subsequently also used to great effect on boys' comics:

'*Tammy* was a working-class girls' comic. It had a very heavy 'chip on its shoulder' kind of message ... we took the thinking that applied to *Tammy*, and applied it to just about everything down the line that followed, whether it was *Battle*, *Action*, *2000AD* ... the old thing that pervades girls' comics all the way through; elitism, and the struggle against it.'

This upgrading might be done with a serious or silly mindset:

'Generally, it was male writers in this field. I think Pat Davison is the only woman I can think of who genuinely had a better touch in the way she did this, she wrote far more from the heart, the rest of us were 23-year-old guys killing ourselves laughing as we wrote this stuff'.

In addition, current popular culture outside comics were taken into account while writing stories:

'Moonchild' was quite deliberately based on *Carrie*. When I talked about starting *Misty*, I said we should look at all the kinds of female adults' fiction that were around at the time, and we should do girls' comics versions of that. It was a deliberately calculated policy to do *Carrie*, to do 'Audrey Rose', which I did as 'Hush, Hush, Sweet Rachel', we never quite got around to doing

Flowers in the Attic, but it was definitely on the list - but most of those female mystery books that were around, we did good girls' comic versions. When *Misty* moved away from that, and got caught up in silly traditional stuff, that's when it lost its way.'

Though not directly mentioned by Mills in this interview, other stories included political or counter-cultural interests such as paganism ('Guardian of White Horse Hill'), the environment ('The Goose Girl', 'Forbidden Garden'), or even global warming or road-building ('Fran of the Floods', 'Jassy's Wand of Power', 'The Green People').

Despite seemingly obvious assumptions about the blandness of typical traditional girls' comics, we have seen that in fact they were crafted to a high standard, though subject to stringent commercial constraints in the shape of set formulas and the need to consistently and directly appeal to the target audience.

The stories in the 'old skool' style comics were not radically different in kind to the newer wave of comics launched by Fleetway in the early 1970s, and both kinds of comics inspired the abiding loyalty of their readership over the years of publication and in the years since they have ceased publishing.

The newer kind of story in *Tammy*, *Jinty*, and *Misty*, particularly with its anti-authoritarian angle, took the empowering theme of the older wave with its female-focused stories and added exciting and unusual elements. The suffering of the old-style characters, which is ultimately redeemed by their survival and triumph against all odds, is joined in these three 1970s comics to a madcap narrative whirl which created tales that still delight, astonish, and intrigue today. Indeed, a large part of that creative energy can paradoxically be traced back to those very pressures of deadline and other commercial realities. ●

Combing Her Golden Hair
WHILE HER FATHER WAS AWAY AT SEA, TAMSIN TREGORRAN LIVED WITH HER STRICT GRAN, WHO FORBADE HER TO GO SWIMMING AND CRUSHED ALL VANITY IN HER. TAMSIN HAD FOUND AN UNUSUAL SILVER COMB, WHICH FILLED HER HEAD WITH VAGUE DREAMS AND LONGINGS! BUT GRAN CAUGHT HER USING IT!
NO, GRAN, PLEASE DON'T CUT OFF MY HAIR!
BUT THAT MINUTE, OUTSIDE THE HOUSE
I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE TAMSIN'S FACE WHEN HER OLD DAD WALKS IN ON SHORE LEAVE!
NO, GRAN, I BEG YOU!
MOTHER, WHAT ON EARTH ARE YOU DOING WITH THOSE SCISSORS?
OH! FATHER'S HERE! REALLY, YOU'LL GRAN WAS GOING TO CUT OFF ALL MY HAIR, PLEASE DON'T LET HER DO IT!
THAT'S JANDSW WHAT ON EARTH'S HAPPENING UP THERE?
GRAN'S NOT WELL. TAMSIN... TAKE HER TO HER ROOM. I'LL DOWNSTAIRS AS AND PUT THE KETTLE ON. THERE'S A GOOD GIRL.
I'M HATE GRAN! I HATE HER!
TAM, LOVE! CALM DOWN. EVERYTHING WILL BE OKAY!
OH, MOTHER, I REALISE WHY YOU TRIED TO DO IT, BUT CUTTING OFF HER LOVELY HAIR IS GOING TOO FAR!
BUT WHY DID SHE TURN ON ME, JUST FOR COMBING MY HAIR? THE LOOK ON HER FACE WAS AWFUL!

Notes and References

Out of a list of comics available during the 60s and 70s, titles marketed specifically at boys included: 2000AD (1977-current), Action (1976-1977), Battle Picture Weekly (1975-1988), Boys' World (1963-1964), Commando Comics (1961-current), The Eagle (1950-1969) and (1982-1994), Roy of the Rovers (1976-1993), Starlord (1978), Valiant (1962-1976), Victor (1961-1992), War Picture Library (1958-1984), Warlord (1974-1986).

Titles marketed at girls included: Bunty (1958-2001), Diana (1963 - 1976), Girl (1951-1964), Jackie (1964-1993), Jinty (1974-1981), Judy (1960-1991), June (1961-1974), Mandy (1967-1991), Mirabelle (1956-1977), Misty (1978-1980), Romeo (1957-1974), Sandie (1972-1973), Tammy (1971-1984), Tina (1967).

List of comics and dates found in http://www.26pigs.com/comics.html and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_British_comic

Not that all comics were strictly segregated by gender – generally speaking, humour comics were more likely to have a broader appeal across the sexes. They might have a variety of male and female characters (Dennis The Menace and Minnie the Minx in the same comic), or strips featuring both boys and girls (the Bash Street Kids). It was also not felt by the kids that all comics were strongly gender-marked – boys and girls would both read and swop various of the humour titles, though for a boy to be seen reading a girls' comic would be beyond unusual and into the realm of suspicious behaviour. Girls, particularly more tomboyish girls, might read some boys' comics – the main example, however, would be 2000AD, with its science fiction content that was not readily available in other comics. Humour titles available at the time included The Beezer (1956-1993), Buster (1960-2000), Cheeky (1977-1980), Cor!! (1970-1974), Cracker (1975-1976), The Dandy (1937-current), Krazy (1976-1978), Monster Fun (1975-1976), Shiver and Shake (1973-1974), The Topper (1953-1990) and (to 1993 with Beezer), Whizzer and Chips (1969-1990), Whoopee! (1974-1985).

There has been a boom in nostalgia publishing of British comics recently, with mass-market reprints taken from Commando, June & Schoolfriend, Jackie, Battle Picture Library, Girl, and many others.

Complete Story
Bird of Fear!
Written by Maureen Spurgeon
Drawn by Luis Bach
Julie and Mandy were out for a ramble when the weather suddenly changed
AIN'T OUR LUCK TO GET CAUGHT IN A STORM! C'MON, PERHAPS WE CAN SHELTER IN THAT RUIN.
AAGH! WHERE'D THAT BIRD COME FROM?
AUNT PROBABLY KNOWS SOMETHING ABOUT...
NOW, KNOCK ON THAT DOOR!
D.D.D. YOU SEE THAT?! I ACCIDENTALLY TOUCHED THE DOOR... AND I JUST SORT OF GREW! THEN I WAS DEFEATED
WELL, GET INSIDE, DREADFUL! IT'S WET OUT HERE!
THAT BIRD, REALLY SMOOTH YOU-UH YOU'LL FEEL BETTER WHEN WE DRY OFF, MAUDY

Ian Kennedy in Space

The Science Fantasy Art of Starblazer Covers

By Brian M Clarke

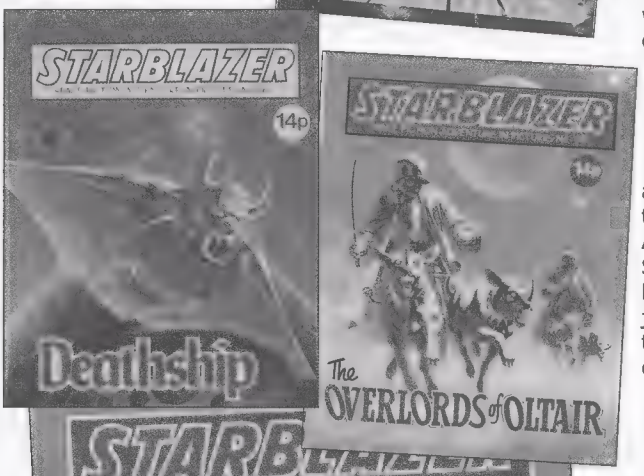
Starblazer totalled up a very respectable 281 issues between its launch in 1979 and its final issue in 1991. Under the excellent editorial guidance of Bill McLoughlin, it successfully evolved from Star Wars inspired soap opera to fantasy and from one-off stories to the introduction of several semi-continuous characters.

One of the most creative of the cover artists was the amazing Ian Kennedy and here are ten covers to give you a taste of Ian Kennedy's artistic prowess. We've split our selection between the early and late runs of Starblazer with a representative five covers from each period.

Sinister City – 19

Still very much in the thrall of Star Wars, this rebels and oppressors tale was written by *Crikey!* contributor Ray Aspden and illustrated by Spanish artist Olivera.

Kennedy's cover takes the power of the Death Star and converts its hard lines and futuristic technology into a sleek, believable fortress.



The Doomsday Machines – 20

Dave Dixon's tale of colonists on a weird jungle world with menacing technology was illustrated by Starblazer regular Jaimie Ortiz.

Kennedy's illustration continues the theme of mechanoid menace and technological terror through wonderfully detailed suggestions of real 'workable' engineering in the design of his attacking ships.

Deathship – 36

S. Neeld's outlaw-owns-an-incredibly-powerful-ship-and-knows-how-to-use-it story was brought to life by the stunning Enrique Alcatena on the inner pages. Alcatena was one of the best artists to work on Starblazer. Ian Kennedy's cover is another of those giant hunks of technology images but it packs a visual wallop just the same. Its demonic look plays perfectly against the supernatural colouring of its green and fiery orange exterior.

The Overlords of Oltair – 39

W. Corderoy's warning of space probes contacting the 'wrong' alien race is finely illustrated by Jaimie Ortiz in a story that still echoes many of the Star Wars tropes.

This is one of the few Kennedy covers to almost duplicate a panel from the story. It also allowed him to take a rest from machinery and spaceships.

The Exterminator – 64

Mike Chinn's comic strip pulp adventure has it all – frontier justice, outlaws, spaceships, a bad guy with a taste for medieval décor and, towards the end, a 'deathstar' of its own. It was all brought to life through the pen and brush of Enrique Alcatena.

Kennedy's cover is more evocative of Star Trek than Star Wars, although the angular design of the spaceship harks back to where it all began.

Beastworld – 221

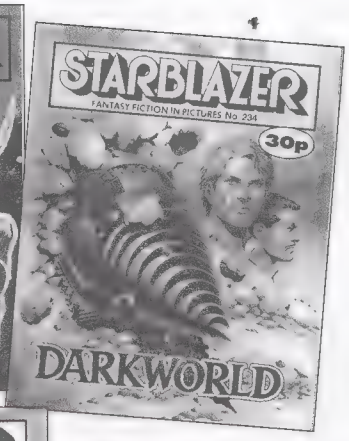
A great Grok and Zero adventure from Alan C Hemus and dramatically illustrated by Enrique Alcatena. The good cop sent to penal world may be old hat and perhaps owed a lot to a recent and similar Judge Dredd story in 2000AD, but what it lacked in originality is made up for in action and character.

Ian Kennedy's cover takes what could have been a lifeless situation and animates it beautifully with whimsical detail.

Darkworld – 234

Alan C Hemus is back with a story of survivors of a nuclear war 500 years past coming out of their underground bunker city to explore the changing surface world. Illustrated by one of the best interior artists, Segura, its use of great page layouts and panel compositions give it an exceptional quality.

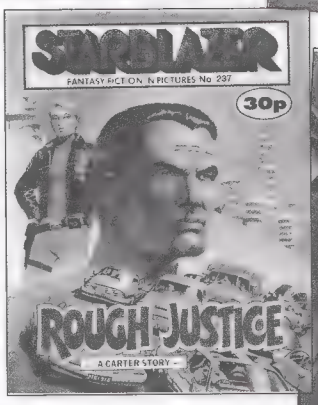
Kennedy's mole machine breaking through the surface has power, impact and believable design. No longer content just to let the hardware speak for itself, headshots of our heroes provide the human touch.

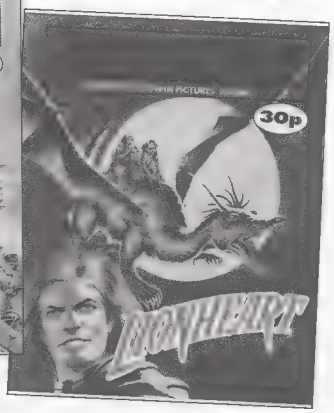


Rough Justice – 237

P. Alexander's Carter story (another one of the semi-regular characters) is a cop having to break in a rookie – and the rookie's a woman! Casanovas Jnr's artwork plays up the noirish aspects of the crimelord-taking-over-the-planet with panache and style.

One of the few Kennedy covers to feature a woman and even this played safe by making her look as boyish as possible. Except for a bit of telltale shading the rookie could easily have been a teenage lad.





Lionheart – 249

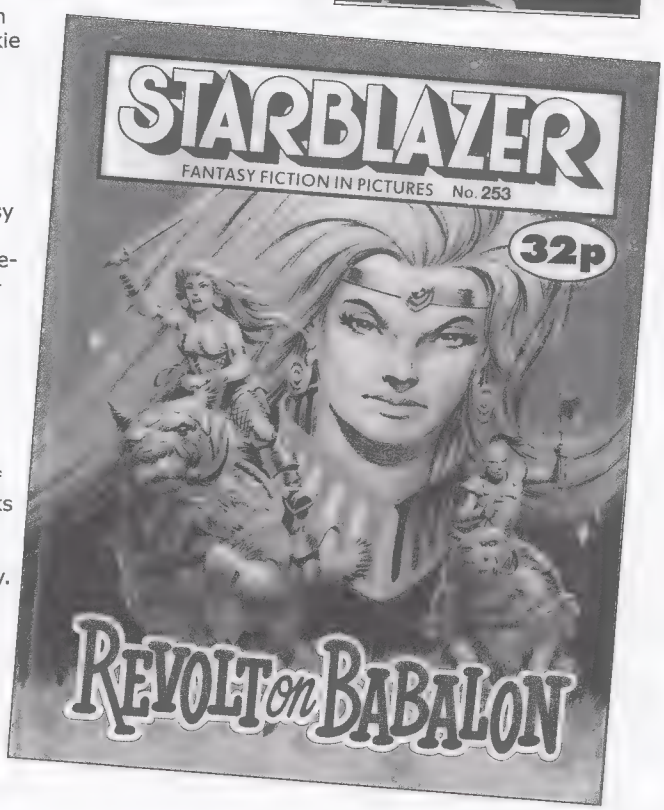
Comics editor Alan Cowsill cut his teeth on this fantasy tale of murdered kings, strange lands, dragons and a young man in training. Illustrated by Alan Burrows, one-time Red Dwarf Smegazine artist, it features more full-page illustrations than most Starblazers.

Moving from SF to fantasy obviously didn't phase Kennedy who turns in a moody cover.

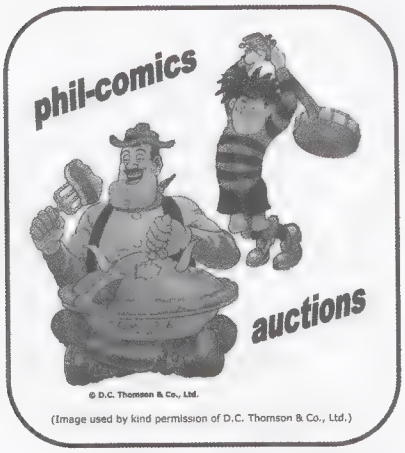
Revolt on Babalon – 253

This Alan C Hemus story is a mixed genre pastiche of Gor, Conan and Edgar Rice Burroughs with huge chunks of space opera thrown in for good measure. Weakly illustrated by Dave Willets, its heavy lines and lifeless characters do little to save an already uninspiring story.

Kennedy finds the right dramatic moment for the cover and even manages to feature two female characters. The design of the beasts must have been dear to Ian's heart as they are obviously tuskless cousins of the Beastworld mounts.



Starblazer was one of the best British SF&F comics and well worth hunting down. In the past year it has become less available at comic and collector fairs, suggesting that many more Starblazer fans are tracking them down. Depending on period – expect to pay anything from 50p to £2.00 a copy.



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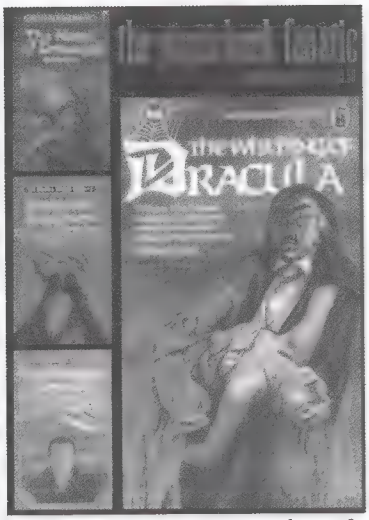

"Just been reading issue four of PF and it is brilliant!"
Brian 'Crikey!' Clarke

Then The Paperback Fanatic is the magazine for you!
Dedicated to the wild and trashy pulps paperbacks of the 1960s/70s, each issue of The Fanatic is loaded with features and articles on horror, fantasy, SF and sleaze, all illustrated with at least one hundred crystal-clear reproductions of wild and weird cover art in each issue.

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The Freak Show! Angels From Hell! The Sucking Pit! Bloodstone!

The Drug Traffic! Voodoo! The Whores of War! Skinhead! Confessions of a Window Cleaner! The Rats!

The Fab Fifties by Mike Morley

the Horror! the Horror!

Mike Morley started collecting comics in 1952 when he was eight years old. His father used to come home from work on a Monday evening, bringing him the 3d Comet – so the cover to this issue of Crikey! *has a particular relevance for Mike!*

Mike is the foremost expert on what has become known as the British black and white comics of the '50s. His book tracing the history of these fondly remembered but increasingly hard-to-find comics is due out soon but for now sit alongside Mike as he takes a look back at these weirdly wonderful British horror comics.

Most of the comics from the 1950s ended happily on a note of optimism with some sort of moral that either over-stated or simply implied that 'people are wonderful', people need understanding and sympathy' or 'good usually triumphs over evil'.

Not so in the American E.C. comics line.

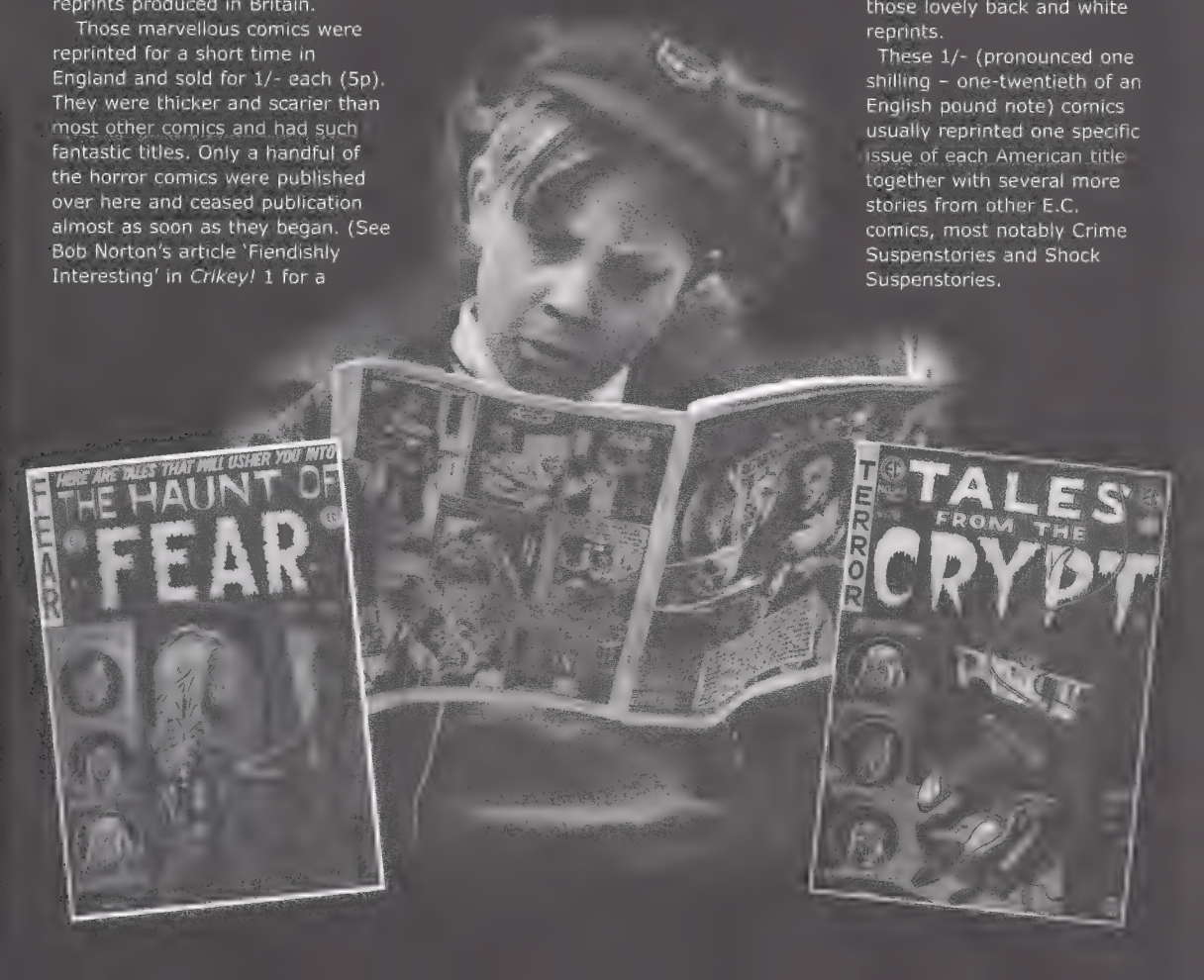
Their terrifyingly terrific line of horror comics had titles such as Tales from the Crypt, Haunt of Fear and Vault of Horror. They were eventually banned in the States and a similar fate befell the reprints produced in Britain.

Those marvellous comics were reprinted for a short time in England and sold for 1/- each (5p). They were thicker and scarier than most other comics and had such fantastic titles. Only a handful of the horror comics were published over here and ceased publication almost as soon as they began. (See Bob Norton's article 'Fiendishly Interesting' in *Crikey!* 1 for a detailed background on what happened to the horror comics in Britain – ed.)

Haunting

Frederick Wertham's anti-comics campaign and the publication of his book Seduction of the Innocent caused a massive clamp down on horror, weird and crime comics in the States. The parallel anti-comic movement here, launched by the National Union of Teachers, soon put a stop to those lovely back and white reprints.

These 1/- (pronounced one shilling – one-twentieth of an English pound note) comics usually reprinted one specific issue of each American title together with several more stories from other E.C. comics, most notably Crime Suspenstories and Shock Suspenstories.



The artwork is undoubtedly the best comic art in the history of the medium with such notables as Al Williamson, Frank Frazetta, Wally Wood and 'Ghastly' Graham Ingles illustrating some of the most shocking short stories ever.

The stories were intelligently written, always with a strong sting in the tale and often with a lovely downbeat ending. If evil was ever to be vanquished it was only by an even greater evil. Strange coincidence and irony were the order of the day.

They played with our expectations of fair play and justice. For example, in 'The Orphan' (Haunt of Fear 1) a nice little girl's evidence sends her mother and her mother's lover to the electric chair. But as the girl gives us a lovely wholesome grin and a wink in the last panel, we learn that it was she who shot her drunken father to pin the blame on her hated mother.

Horror – UK style

These tales of terror were introduced by three special characters – The Old Witch, The Vault Keeper and The Crypt Keeper. In an anthology comic without continuous characters, the host gave the title a sense of continuity – even if all the main characters were finished off in each issue!

The UK Tales From the Crypt reprints all four stories from the American TFC 40 plus four crime stories. It even has a non-EC boxing story called 'Rocky Steele'.

'Standing Room Only', a rare transvestite story, tells of a man who kills for money then disguises himself as a rather nice-looking woman – only to be caught she inadvertently enters the men's room instead of the ladies. Simple but effective.

Tales From the Crypt 2 reprints American edition 41. Both issues have wonderful Jack Davis covers.

Companion titles to these were the UK editions of Black Magic, Frankenstein, Ghostly Weird and Startling Terror.

Frankenstein ran for five issues with atmospheric Frankenstein stories printed from the American Prize and Frankenstein comics (with superb artwork by Dick Briefer).

That old ...

Black Magic ran for 16 issues as well as a Black Magic album. This bumper album was much thicker than even the fat 68-page 1/- comics and sold for an expensive 3/6 (three-and-six – three shillings and six pence, in old money). A Black Magic Album 2 was advertised but no copies appear to have been printed.

One of the stories in the Black Magic Album was the priceless propaganda tale 'When You Die' which extolled the virtues of being a free American citizen by comparing living standards with a trio of 'hell-planets'.

Each planet was a stand-in for political systems on Earth – one wold was a planet of slaves, another one where the public faced mass starvation and the third was so over-populated that there was only enough room for its inhabitants to stand packed shoulder to shoulder.

The unlucky aliens dream of a world with "The priceless gift of freedom... abundance of food... (and a) land which is big and roomy".

And just in case the reader didn't get the message (It's America, stupid!), the final panel shows the Statute of Liberty with the comment "How do you feel in America... where each day, you're living in Heaven!"

Another well-remembered tale opens Black Magic issue 11 (as well as gracing its cover). This was the superb Simon and Kirby giant bug story 'The Angel of Death'. The wonderfully atmospheric cover shows the shadow of a monster insect cast in black on to a bedroom wall as a terrified man holds a rifle to protect a young woman in bed.

Simon and Kirby (and fellow Marvel artist Steve Ditko) contributed several excellent stories to this title. They drew the dramatic lead story 'Man Eater' in BM 13 about a huge man-eating plant. These were exactly the kind of stories I loved.

Sometimes American reprinted stories would appear in more than one UK title. A case in point is The Heap story that appears in both BM 13 and in the 1/- Frankenstein 3. I guess they assumed no-one was going to be paying too much attention to what they published and where. It's something that has troubled UK comic collectors for decades as stories and characters migrated from title to title without warning.

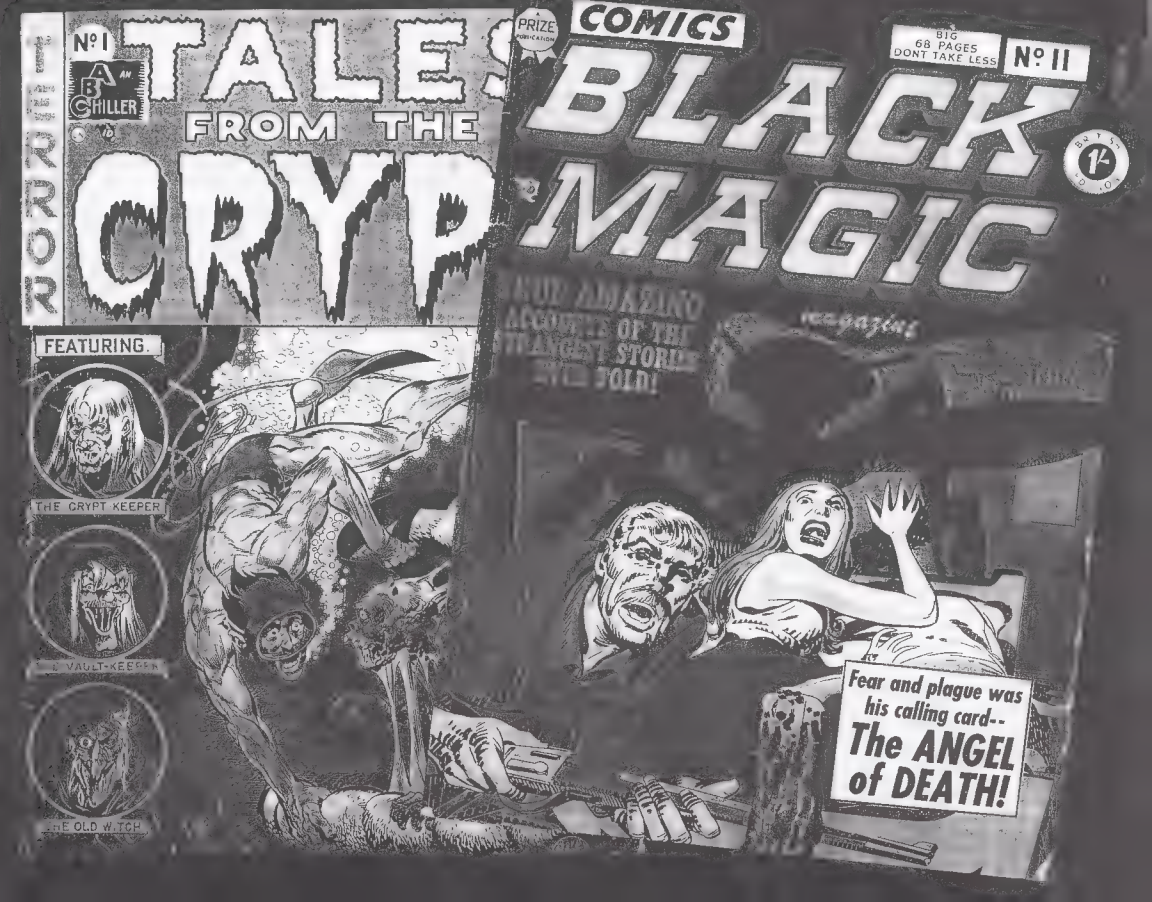
BM 14 has 'Monsters on the Lake', a nicely moralistic tale of visiting saucer-men killed by fearful and savage humans. As he lays dying in the final panel the alien whispers a plaintive "Which were the men, which the monsters?"

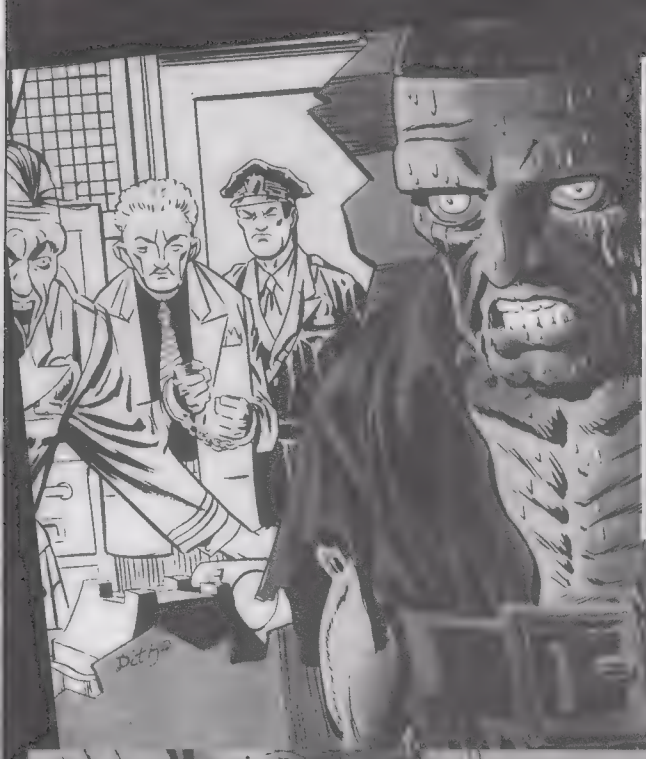
Shocking stories

Two more nice 1950s 1/- horror comics were Ghostly Weird and Startling Terror. Both were published simultaneously by the Arnold Book Company and sadly only lasted a single issue each.

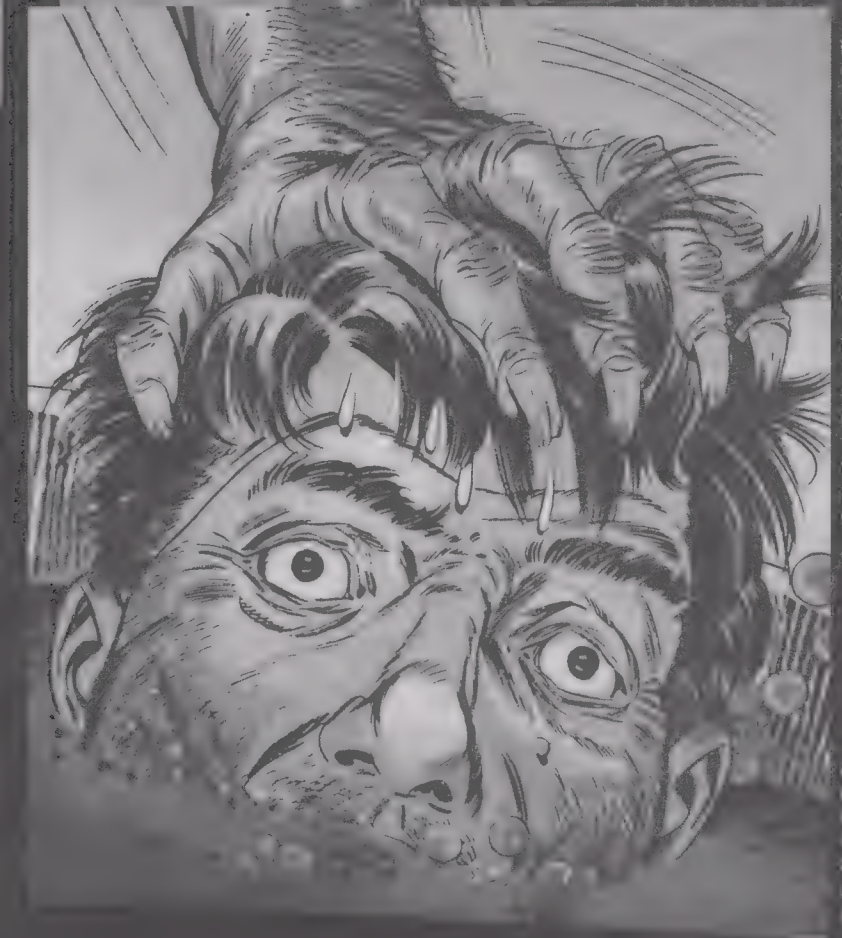
Both comics have covers by L.B. Cole and contain interior artwork by Jay Disbrow, one of my favourite artists of the period and one who is undeservingly often over-looked in comicbook histories.

Crime and jungle stories also featured in these titles but the highspot of Startling Terror was Jay Disbrow's 'Creeping Death'. This shocking story featured a lovely flesh-dripping one-eyed monster (accidentally created when spilled chemicals combined to gruesome effect). It reminds me very much of the 1950s movie The Blob with Steve McQueen.





IN OUR STATE MURDERERS DIE IN THE ELECTRIC CHAIR MOMMY WENT FIRST
THEN DADDY
SO LIKE I SAID IN THE BEGINNING EVERYTHING WORKED OUT SWELL I LIVE IN A NICE HOUSE NOW, WITH NICE FURNITURE I HAVE ALL THE TOYS I WANT AND ALL THE LOVE I NEED YOU SEE THE COURT SENT ME TO LIVE WITH AUNT KATE
WHICH IS IT THE WAY I'D HOPED I WOULD WORK OUT WHEN I SHOT DADDY FROM THE FRONT BEDROOM WINDOW WITH THE GUN I KNEW WAS IN THE NIGHT TABLE AND WENT DOWNSTAIRS AND PUT THE GUN IN MOMMY'S HAND AND STARTED THE CRYING BIT



The lead story in Ghostly Weird is Jay Disbrow's 'Death Ship', a story about a astro-explorer in deep space. Like many characters in these stories, he meets his end in a violent way when his spaceship explodes when the sun goes nova.

As mentioned elsewhere (Crikey! 1, for example) a public backlash against the perceived violence, brutality and horror of 'childrens' comics led to them being banned in the UK. Magazine articles with headlines such as 'How Do Horror Comics Affect Children?" and 'Should U.S. 'Comics' Be Banned? With the straplines Their sales are leaping in Britain, Do parents realise the effect they can have? did their damage.

My comics disappeared from the mainstream shops – but if you knew to look, you could still get those increasingly rare back issues.

And I'm still looking! ●

Next issue, in the concluding part of Mike Morley's fascinating and personal look at the fab comics of the '50s he takes a look at a very American genre – the superhero. Just how will you see what we Brits did to the men (and women) in tights!

This is our regular spot in which guest contributors reminisce about their halcyon childhood days of reading comics. The title is, of course, a bit of a swizz because most of us will write about other days besides Saturday. I just thought that My Comicy Saturday had a nice ring to it. So although Saturday was the Big Comic Day, writers can summon forth memories from any day of the week. If you want to join in the fun and reveal the origins of your addiction, get in touch. The more, the loonier! Send your submission through the website (www.crikeyuk.co.uk).

My Comicy Saturday

By Dave Gibbons

Dave Gibbons, has been playing a major role in the world of comics for over 30 years now. He began his comics career in 1973. His work has been and still is published all over the world. He has depicted the adventures of Superman, Batman, Dr Who, Dan Dare *and* Green Lantern, *amongst many others. He co-created the long running* Rogue Trooper *for 2000AD, where he also worked on* 'Harlem Heroes'. *He collaborated with Alan Moore on the legendary* Watchmen *for D.C. comics in 1986/87, for which he received a Hugo Award.*

Looking back I guess that Saturday was the top comic day of the week, although my comic buying wasn't limited to that one day. A friend of mine from school, Richard Williams (Taffy), and I always used to go around after school to the local newsagents that sold American comics. There were about four or five of them in our area.

One in particular had this guy who, when he realised we were really keen fans, used to save the bundles of imported American comics until we came in the shop as he knew we would be in there every few days. he used to actually let us cut the piece of string on the bundle of comics, which was a huge thrill. This meant that we actually got to see them before anybody else had looked them over.

They would be in great condition except for the few on the top and bottom that had been damaged by the tight string. If we didn't get them from there it was over to the spinner rack and that was always something of a crap shoot as there were four sides to the spinner rack and two of us who could only have two sides each.

It was complete chance as to whether the titles you wanted were on your side or whether your pal was going to get them. This left room for some serious swapping later on.

Fantastic Fourpence ha'penny

There was another place in St Albans that I remember as rather a strange shop. It was mainly a toy-seller but it had a shelf to one side where there were piled old comics that you could buy for half price. In fact the copy of *Fantastic Four* 1 that I own was bought in that very shop and still has a big fourpence-halfpenny (that's around 2p kids or 4 cents to our newly arrived American readers) sign scrawled across the cover. It rather detracts from its value but marks it as a genuine artifact of those times.

IND
THE Fantastic Four
APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE AUTHORITY
MC
1 NOV.
10¢
-I--I CAN'T TURN INVISIBLE FAST ENOUGH!! HOW CAN WE STOP THIS CREATURE, TORCH?
JUST WAIT AND SEE SISTER! THE FANTASTIC FOUR HAVE ONLY BEGUN TO FIGHT!
FEATURING: "THE THING!" "MR. FANTASTIC!" "HUMAN TORCH!" "INVISIBLE GIRL!" TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME IN ONE MIGHTY MAGAZINE!
THE THREE OF YOU CAN'T DO IT ALONE! IT'S TIME FOR THE THING TO TAKE A HAND!
IT'LL TAKE MORE THAN ROPES TO KEEP MISTER FANTASTIC OUT OF ACTION!

Fantastic Four 1 (November 1961). Art by Jack Kirby & Dick Ayers.

That's not my only memory of that place – there used to be a stall on the local market which sold all kind of things, paperbacks, mens' magazines and a few comics and I can remember being there one Saturday with my dad – and how's this for a Comicy Saturday – he pointed to a pile of comics and said, "Oh look, David – have you got that one ?" and it was a pile of twenty or thirty Fantastic Four number ones!

They were all in mint condition with no newsagent scribble on the front.

I often think if I had a time machine that would be the moment I would go back to. I'd like to go back there and pick some up. Well all actually!

Stamp Collector

I used to find myself out and about with my dad on a Saturday. I guess it was his way of trying to keep me busy and off my Mum's back. We regularly used to go to a market in Hatfield. It was called Eddie's Books. I remember the name because he had a big rubber stamp and everything you bought from him used to get the Eddie's Books stamp on it.

Everything was returnable at half price and I still have lots of comics from there have that stamp on them. I remember buying the *Mad Comic* reprint paperbacks from there. I took them all back and exchanged them at half price for the next one in the series and I probably went through them three or four times. I don't know why I didn't just bite the bullet and actually buy them in the first place. The result was that I had to wait until much later to get copies of these that I would keep.

I've talked about American comics so far but I wanted to set the scene for what Saturday was like. Of course there were British comics as well. There was a couple that I loved. I used to get the *Eagle* and rather than have it delivered to me I would walk to the newsagent and get it because I didn't want it folded in half and shoved through the door. My copy was always there because I had it reserved.

The man behind the counter used to rather humorously refer to it as the Ee – ag – Lee. He was some kind of ex-serviceman and that was his idea of a joke. I have many fond memories of walking down the road with my head stuck in the *Eagle*. There were of course the pages that I loved – mainly 'Dan Dare'.

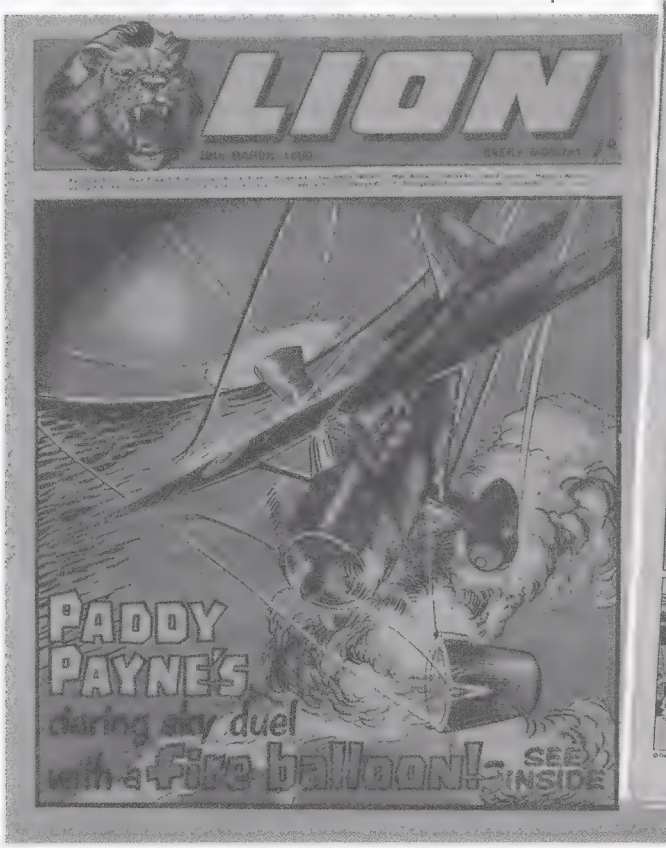
I also have some vague earlier memories of my dad bringing back copies of the *Eagle*. He loved comics and science fiction and stuff like that so I think that buying them for me was just his excuse to look at them himself. I certainly remember being conscious of the *Eagle* before I could actually read it.

Mad Dad

The other comic that I have great memories of was *Lion*. Again I'd go and pick it up on the day it came out – I never waited to get them together. I didn't collect that one as I did the *Eagle*.

There were other odd things like *Rocket* (see *Crikey!* 2) and of course I used to get the *Beano* and the *Dandy* when I was much younger. I grew out of them later on although aunts and uncles would always get me a *Beano* book for Christmas and I used to quite enjoy keeping up with the characters in that way.

My dad brought home the very first issue of *Mad Magazine*. I never had it saved for me but would go out and buy it regularly. It was always a happy day when I



EAGLE AND Boys' World
9 January 1965 Vol 16 No. 2
EVERY WEDNESDAY 6d.
THE GUINEA-PIG Gripping new serial - - Page 14
JENNINGS in a TANGLED WEB - Page 7
THE WOLF DRAWS BLOOD! - - Page 10
FISHING FOR DOLPHINS - - - - Page 16
DAN DARE
in THE MUSHROOM
CONTINUED ON BACK PAGE

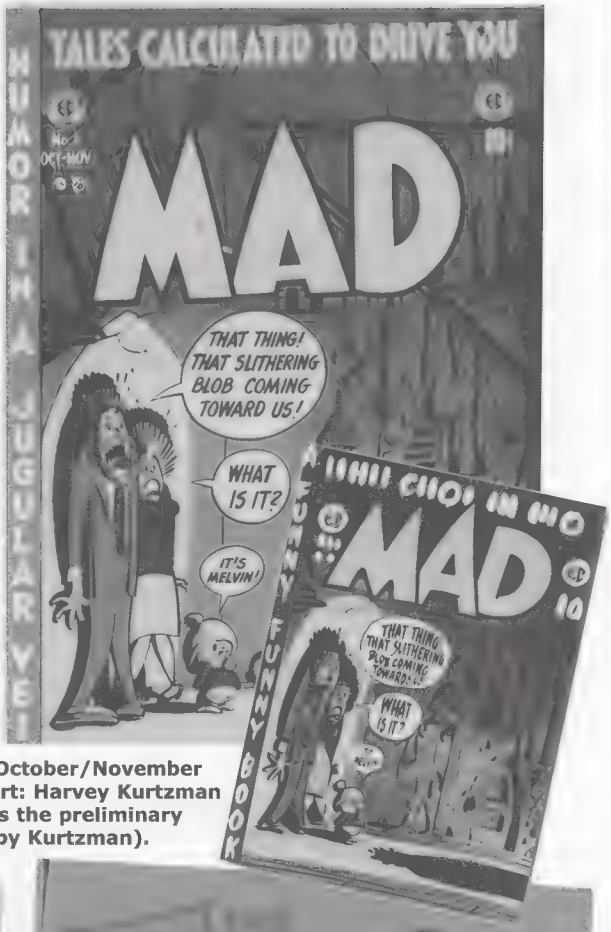
saw a new copy of *Mad* on the stand. Those are my memories of the day and the more I look back I think that my dad must have been pretty generous buying me so many comics although I would save up my pocket money.

The only other thing I would want to add about those days is what great fun it was. Nowadays people have a local comic shop and know months in advance what comics are coming out. They can reserve them and get back issues very easily. In the days when I was buying these things it was much more hit and miss. You might not be able to find an issue of a comic that you were really waiting for and the continued stories in British comics could be ruined if you missed a week.

You may even have found one you were missing in some out of the way place. I remember going on holiday once to a remote beach and finding a beach shop that inexplicably had multiple copies of *Fantastic Four* 21 and I believe *Sergeant Fury* 1, which had just never appeared on the newsstands where I lived. Somehow or other they had all found their way to this place at the seaside. The seaside would be a good place for selling comics I guess. Bored kids on holiday with plenty of pocket money.

There was a great uncertainty about buying comics that seems to have disappeared. I've filled in many gaps in my collection and its great to have complete runs but I will always treasure the comics that I remember buying on a certain day, in a certain place and with a certain person.

On a certain Comicy Saturday ... ●



MAD 1 October/November 1952. Art: Harvey Kurtzman (Inset is the preliminary sketch by Kurtzman).

Are these the UK's Rarest Comic Annuals?

By Bob Norton

Part Two

In our previous issue, comic strip historian Bob Norton discussed the thorny subject of British annuals, their scarcity and values. Bob listed the first part of his top ten rarest annuals and this time round he completes his countdown to the hardest-to-find annuals on the British comics collecting scene.
(For a description of Bob's Rarity Index, see Crikey! *3).*

5 Whizzbang Comics 1942 and 1943 (1 and 2)

Two rare annuals published by Amalgamated Press were the bonfire night Whizzbang Comics in 1942 and 1943.

"Please Take Your Seats for 104 pages of Fun and Thrills" reads the caption on page one! Certainly, Whizzbang Comics had more than its fair share of reprinted material. Almost all of the comic strips were drawn by great comic book artists of the 1930s and '40s such as Roy Wilson, Bertie Brown, Ray Bailey and Reg Perrott and had previously appeared in issues of *Sparkler*, *Butterfly*, *Golden*, *Puck* and *Jolly*.

The annual was a lively addition to a contracting market: it's a pity so very few copies of either edition exist today. Due to the tightening rules on the use of paper during the war they had low print runs and the fact that most children's publications ended up in paper drives added to scarcity. Even finding a copy of the cover of the 1943 annual was tough!

Rarity Index Band II - 16 to 39 copies existing in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: 20 copies of each year.

Recent Auction Price: None known in past five years.

The most expensive UK annuals are mainly the early DCT annuals. Compal do get high prices for these books and their data is my main source, although it's hard to be definitive on which are the ten most expensive. Here's my list as of Xmas 2007 of 10 different most valuable UK annuals. They are in order of increasing auction price achieved over the last 5 years where they exist and all prices include 10% buyer's premium.

Due to a combination of factors that collectors will be instantly aware of, these annuals may be easier to find than the ten rarest I have looked at but they command higher prices. For now.

Magic Annual 1942 – none found in last 5 yrs but sure to be top 10!

Magic Annual 1943 - £951 taped spine Compal – another top 10er!

New Adventures of Rupert 1936 in wrapper - £1,540 Nov 2005 Compal.

Beano Annual 1944 - £2,148 Compal.

Broons 1942 - £3,691 Sep 03 Compal.

Beano Annual 1940 - £3,872 Jun 2004 Compal.

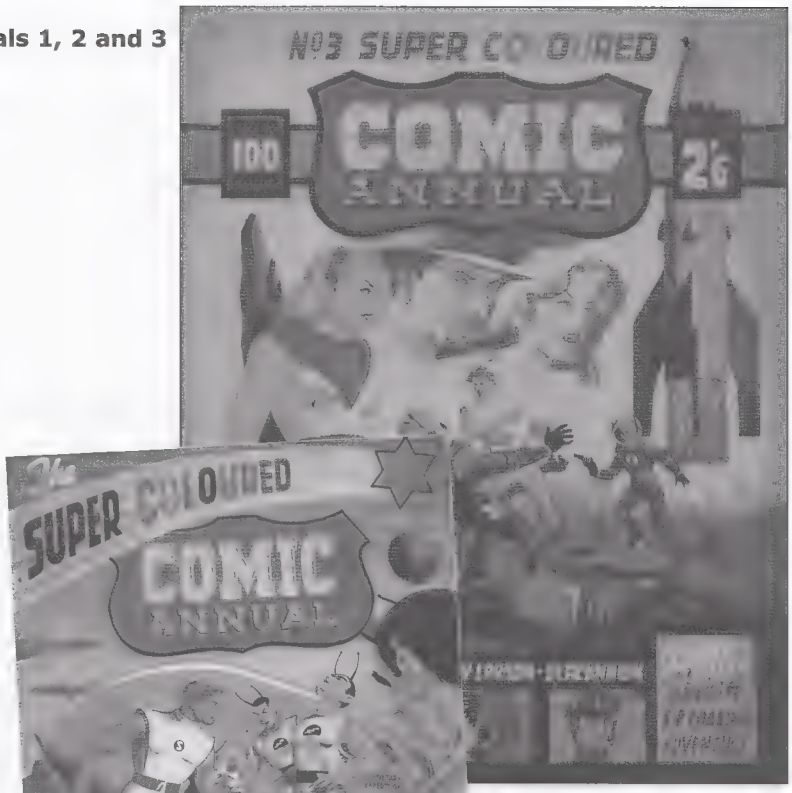
Oor Wullie 1940 - hardback version £4,015 in Sept 05 Compal. A Fine example found in an Edinburgh loft, recently exchanged hands for £4,500!

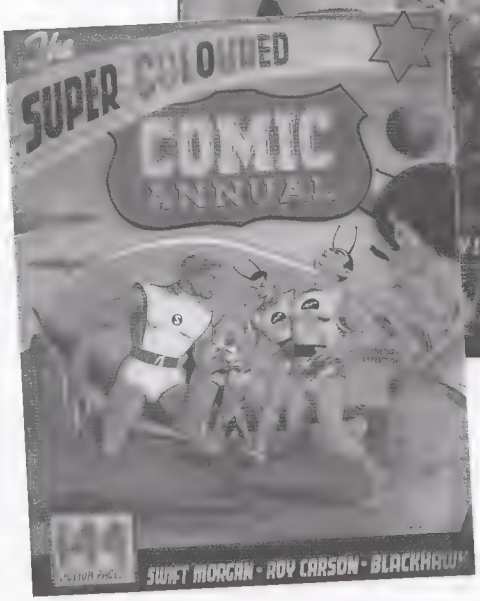
Broons Annual 1939 - £5,390 in Sept 03 Compal.

Dandy Annual 1939 - £6,232 in the Sep 2006 Compal.

Rupert Annual 1973 (Brown Face) - £23,000 Dukes Auction Aug 2007.

4 Super Coloured Comic Annuals 1, 2 and 3





These three are my personal favourites and each is really rare, probably Rarity Index I.

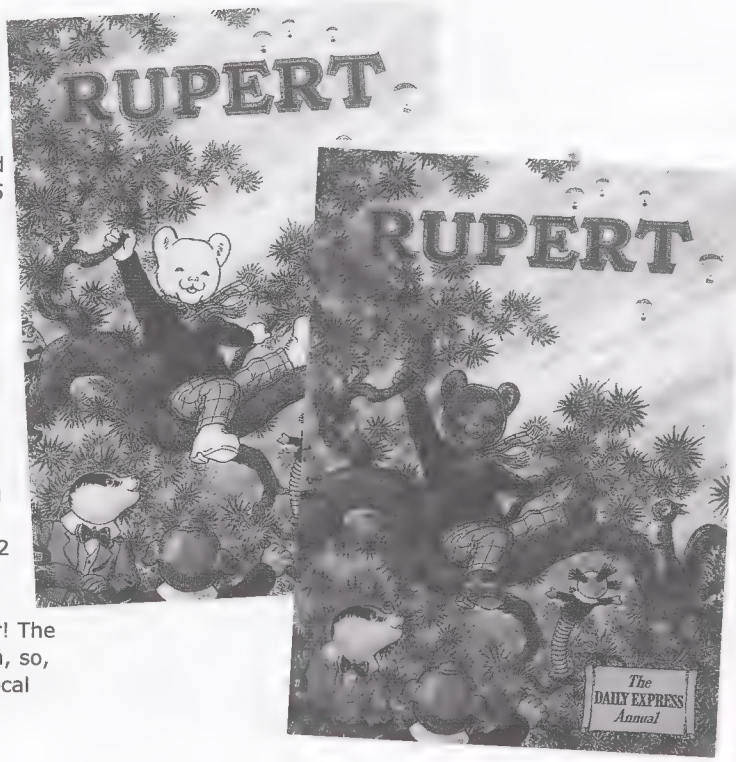
The 3d TV Boardman two-tone photogravure comics produced in the early 1950s and illustrated by Denis McLoughlin were the basis of these three mid-1950s annuals priced at 2/6. The annuals were composed of returns of these 3d comics from newsagents. Titles such as Roy Carson and Swift Morgan were bound with completely new card covers, again painted by Denis McLoughlin of Buffalo Bill Annuals fame. Besides the strip reprints, there were text stories featuring the same characters (plus 'Blackhawk') with featured spot illustrations in annuals 2 and 3 by McLoughlin. They had new endpapers and the first annual has a full colour original strip 'Swift Morgan and the Knights of the Round Table' which for McLoughlin' completists makes 1 very desirable.

Rarity Index Band I - 1 to 16 copies of each year existing in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: around 15 or so copies of each. As to which is the rarest of the three, arguably it's number 3, which I think has THE best cover of any UK annual.

Recent Auction Price: None found for any of the three.

3 The Rupert Annual 1973



The story behind this rarity is an odd one! Rupert was traditionally drawn with a brown face on annual covers. In the strips he always had a white face and, with the 1973 annual, Bestall had produced his traditional brown-faced cover. 12-15 proof copies were produced with Bestall's cover intact. Between proofing and printing, however, somebody in the Daily Express production department changed the colour of Rupert's face and boots so that they became white on the actual print-run, which at the time was over 100,000 copies! Alfred Bestall took exception to this and never submitted a Rupert Annual cover again, although his stories for the interior carried on until 1983.

Rarity Index Band I - 1 to 16 copies surviving in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: 12 to 15 proofs produced.

Recent Auction Price: Sept 07, two sold for £22,000 and £23,000 at an auction in Dorchester! The whereabouts of only five of these proofs is known, so, *Crikey!* readers, where are the others - in your local charity shop?

2 'Radio Fun Annual' 1950 with Tommy Handley cover

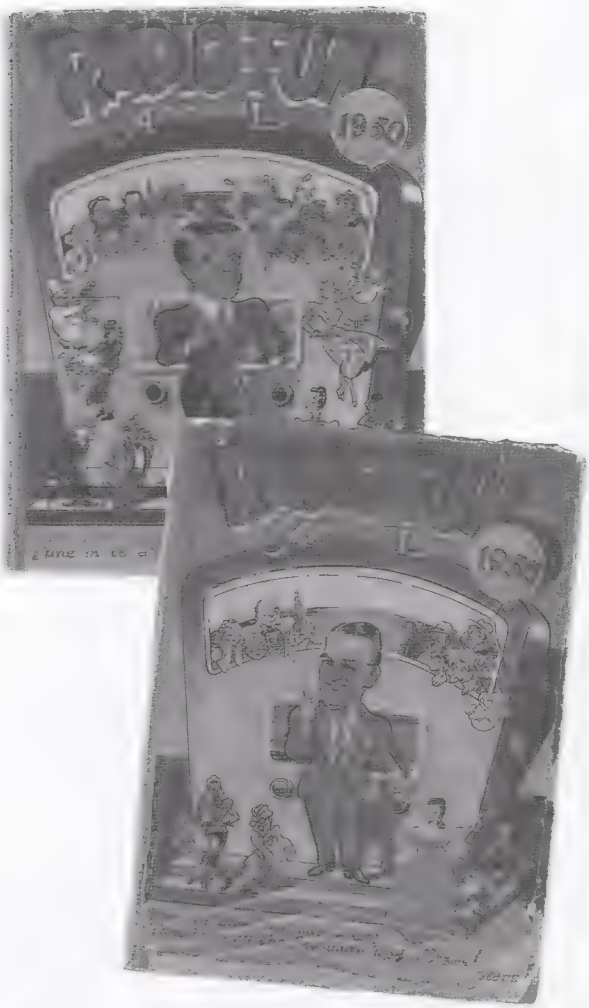
The normal 1950 Radio Fun annual has Wilfred Pickles on the cover – but this was not way it was planned!

The original cover was supposed to have had Tommy Handley, the 'famous and very popular star of 'ITMA' ('It's That Man Again' – the wartime comedy show!). Unfortunately, he died in January 1949! The annual cover would have been printed by this time, ready for sale in September. Obviously a replacement was rushed through. This is a really cool annual to find with its original Handley cover as a few sneaked out. I know of only three, so always give 1950 Radio Fun Annuals a thorough once over!

Rarity Index I: - 1 to 16 copies surviving in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: maybe half a dozen!

Recent Auction Price: None auctioned in last 5 years - I've only known one ever sold and that was to my friend for £40 about 10 years ago – a bargain!



1 'Classics Illustrated: Exciting Mystery Stories' 1952

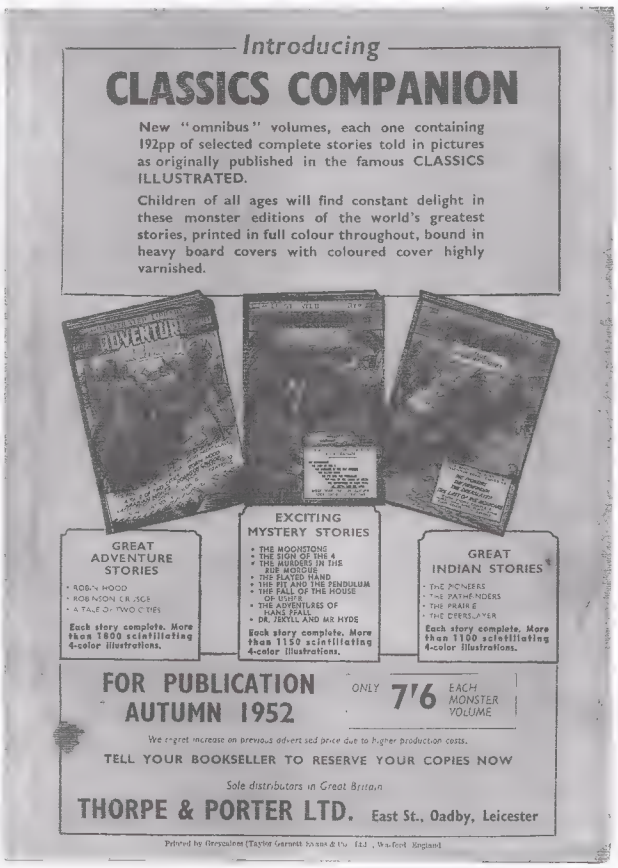
Now this annual is my tease! No known copy exists, yet it was advertised widely for publication in 1952 as part of a trilogy entitled The Classics Illustrated Library – all to be published together with Great Adventure Stories and Great Indian Stories – distributed in the UK by Thorpe and Porter.

The latter two annuals are RIB IV and come up from time to time but not the 'Mystery' title! So, does it really exist or not? Well, there is a parallel in UK comics as this question has been asked of two early 1950s British horror comics - Vault of Horror 1 and Black Magic Annual 2. Adverts in the 'Items Wanted' section of a recent Book & Magazine Collector (December 2007) confirm that dealers still believe these two exist despite many claims to the contrary – so why not this annual?

Rarity Index Band I: 1 to 15 copies exist in VG++ or better.

Best Estimate of Actual Number Existing: A tantalising one or two?

Recent Auction Price: Great Adventure Stories £48 March 2005, Great Indian Stories £61 same auction. No instances of 'Exciting Mystery Stories' (surprise!) – name your price if you find one! ●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This concludes Bob's look at the UK's Rarest Annuals - please feel free to comment via letter or the website!

My Top Tip from the List

Is there a 'sleeper' in the above list that is currently way undervalued? Well yes! I think it's number 2 on the list - the 1950 Radio Fun with the Tommy Handley cover.

If you think about it, why should the 1973 Rupert be £23,000 when all they did was change the colour of his face and shoes! You might say Rupert collectors are completists and that's why but there's the difference with the US market at the moment: a rarity like this with its wartime links and great internal art would be very valuable there! Still, UK comics and annuals are very much on the up with the likes of the recent *Comics Britannia* series on BBC4, so who knows; it may be fetching £1,000 plus in a couple of years!

Of course the above list is only one chap's opinion, so if you know better and hopefully have the evidence to back up your choice then give us your feedback by the letters page or via the *Crikey!* website: **www.crikeyuk.co.uk**

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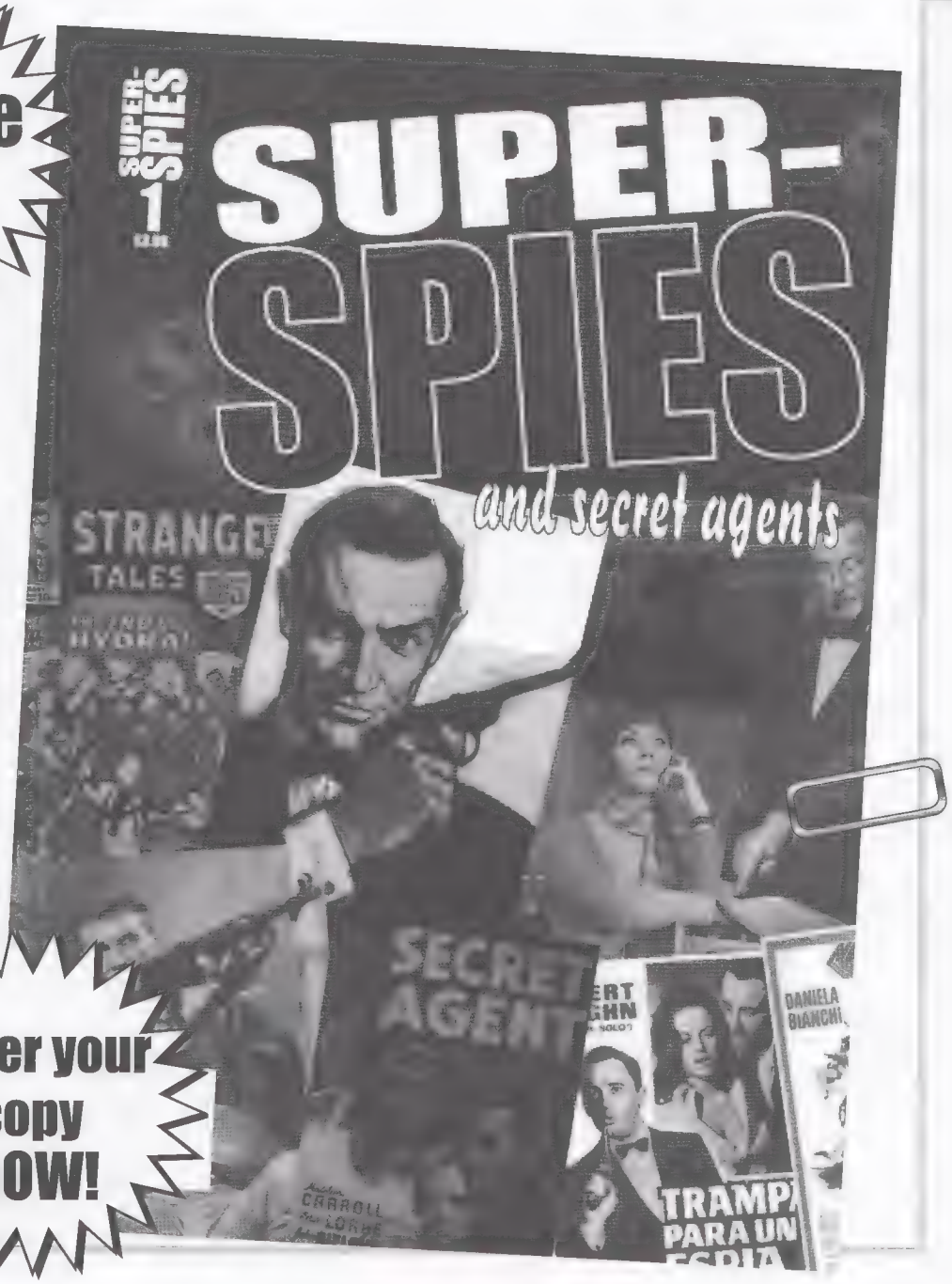

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We each have a personal real-life comic hero. An artist, writer – or if you are really geeky, an editor or letterer – who transformed the way you enjoyed comics.

Glenn B Fleming has a number of heroes and this time round he gives us his reasons for making a hero out of ...

Mike Noble

by Glenn B Fleming

As a child, Mike Noble spent all of his time drawing; people, horses, tanks, trees – anything and everything. This, of course, is not that unusual in a child, but young Mike drew better than anyone he knew did. Much better. Those people, horses, tanks and trees actually looked like people, horses, tanks and trees.

His mother knew early on that her little Mike was a talented artist, though she never knew that the greater part of Mike's talent lay in the fact that, in the days of his childhood, there were not many aspiring artists he could learn much from. There were not many comics or illustrated books he could study to learn his technique in figure drawing and the like. So, like all major talent, whatever their particular field, Mike became the visionary and honed his skills from good to outstanding through to exceptional with little or no outside help.

His use of colour is second to none in the comics medium and, like his equally talented peers, Bellamy, Hampson and Embleton, Mike forged ahead in his early years, experimenting and learning to apply that knowledge while producing some of the most outstanding British comic art of the 20th Century.

A Noble start

Mike Noble left regular education and attended the School of Art at the South West Essex Technical College, spending his days working on commercial art and life drawing rather than illustration.

As I look back at my own career, I seem to have followed a similar path - the difference being that I never got out of commercial art and, of course, I'm not the artist Mike Noble is. The disappointment of my not pursuing a comic art career is tempered by the fact that, maybe, I just wasn't quite good enough.

Noble's first job was in an advertising studio in High Holborn (London) and he has been quoted as saying that his first intentions were not to draw boys' papers or comics for a living, but to work in commercial art. This is the path he trod until 1947. Then, following his introduction into the art world as an office boy at Chelsea Studios, his country called and National Service became a reality in the shape of the army.

Caught in a metallic dust storm, the detached excursion vehicle of Zero X is forced to make a blind landing on Mars. Captain Paul Travers gets out to clear radio-jamming dust from the hull . . . and the scientist Carlson comes with him . . .
THE WEIRD LIFE-FORMS THAT INHABIT THE MOUNTAIN REGIONS OF MARS ARE WATCHFUL...
SUDDENLY...
DON'T PANIC, CARLSON! DON'T PANIC!

WHAT? GOOD GRIEF! THE IDIOT'S GOING FOR A CLOSER LOOK AT THE ROCK SNAKES!

CARLSON! COME BACK! THOSE THINGS ARE DEADLY DANGEROUS!

FASCINATING! LIVING CREATURES MADE OF ACTUAL ROCK! IF I COULD FIND OUT THEIR INTELLIGENCE LEVEL...

THEN A VICIOUS KNEE SLAMS UP

YOU WON'T STOP ME! NOBODY'S GONNA STOP ME!

AAAGH!

AMIDST A HOLOCAUST OF HURTLING FLAME, PAUL TRAVERS GRAPPLES WITH THE FEAR-CRAZED MAN...

FOR PETE'S SAKE! IF I CAN'T GET HIM TO THE M.E.V. BEFORE HOLES BURN IN THESE PRESSURE SUITS, IT'S CURTAINS!

AND AN EXPLOSIVE CHARGE BLASTS THE ESCAPE UNIT FREE.

A fantastic display of Mike's illustrations from TV21.

(Above) Black Beauty and Jenny (Look-In Oct 1974).

(Opposite) Zero X Commander Paul Travers and his crew struggle to control their spacecraft ...

(Below) Fireball XL5's Steve Zodiac saves the day again (TV21 May 1965).

Fortunately, Mike managed to get into the Regimental Drawing Office whilst serving in Catterick. Mike would have to draw uniforms, caps, badges, helmets and all the typical Army hardware - but, strangely, not weapons.

The Noble art

Eighteen months later, he was honourably discharged from the army and went back to Chelsea Studios and realised that working in the commercial art world wasn't allowing him to use his most treasured natural skill: drawing. Disillusioned, Mike looked for another position, one that would give him the job satisfaction he craved, the opportunity he needed and the money required to live.

In 1952, a meeting with artist and illustrator Leslie Caswell changed Mike's life. Caswell was at that time producing work for magazines such as *John Bull*, *Woman* and *Woman's Own*. Caswell needed an understudy, but needed that someone to possess enough talent and experience to work on their own. Noble heard of Caswell's dilemma, collected samples of some of the work he had produced at Chelsea and put it all together in a portfolio. He also included all the things he liked drawing plus sketches from his stint at Catterick. This addition proved to be the key to his future. Caswell had served in the Royal Artillery during the war and upon seeing Noble's work on military hardware was so impressed that he offered him the job.

Mike found himself almost immediately working on a strip called 'Simon and Sally' for the relatively new *Robin* comic.

Caswell became Noble's mentor, showing him techniques in storytelling; the secrets of sequential art. Caswell impressed on the young Noble that the first figure should always be looking or pointing into the strip to guide the reader into the work, the importance of close ups and when to use them, composition and perspective.

The work was increasingly diverse and Noble was drawing babies one day and then cars driving off cliffs the next and then a love story the day after.

THE WATER POURS INTO THE MACHINE'S DELICATE RADAR MECHANISM. THERE IS A SHORT CIRCUIT, AND ...
THAT WAS A SMART PIECE OF THINKING, COMMANDER --- PITY I DIDN'T TRY IT FIRST
WELL, ZODIAC--- THAT'S WHY I'M A COMMANDER AND YOU'RE ONLY A COLONEL.
OKAY, LET'S GET AFTER THEM
WONDER WHERE THIS LEADS TO
THE SEA'S MY GUESS, COMMANDER --- NOT MUCH POINT OF IT GOING INLAND
AT A FAST TROT, THE LITTLE PARTY MAKES ITS WAY ALONG THE UNDERGROUND CORRIDOR SUDDENLY, IT OPENS ON TO A HUGE CAVERN
PHEW--- WHAT A PLACE
STEVE--- OVER BY THE SUB. THEY'RE CASTING OFF
HALF AHEAD. STAND BY TO DIVE
OPEN UP! THE ARMY'S OUT HERE. LET US IN.
WE'VE MISSED THEM!
ARREST THOSE GUYS! COME ON, COMMANDER--- WE'VE GOT TO ALERT THE NAVAL AIR CORPS. I WANT THAT SUB PICKED UP BY SPOTTER 'PLANES
THEN WHAT, STEVE--- WHO'S GOING TO CAPTURE IT?
STINGRAY, COMMANDER--- TROT TEMPEST IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN HELP US NOW!

American comics were a big influence on Noble's art and it seems that wherever comics are, the impact of the great Jack Kirby is never that far away. Back then, Noble would rather have been drawing action stories than romance, but soon realised that a mixture of both might be needed in future work.

Noble thoughts

Leslie Caswell decided he'd move down to Cornwall and asked Noble if he might go with him. Noble turned him down for two reasons. Firstly, Mike didn't want to be in somebody else's shadow all his career. Secondly – he simply didn't want to move.

After Caswell's departure, Noble worked for *TV Express* (originally *Junior Express*, then *Express Weekly*) producing cowboy stories, revealing in his depiction of horses and stage coaches. Noble could draw anything well and as a boy had set himself the task of doing just that.

He rarely used models of any kind, preferring to work from memory and imagination, though he would be supplied with photos of cowboys and the types of buildings they lived in. As an artist, Noble would adapt and learn as he applied his skills, never daunted (as I was) by the huge expanse of the blank, white page.

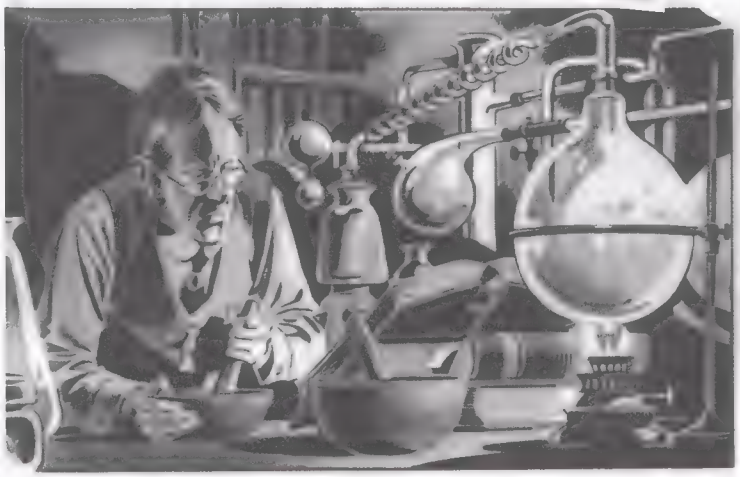
Noble's art technique developed from these assignments; he would never use opaque white to 'whiteout' any mistakes, instead taking full advantage of the china clay surface of the board, running a fresh Gillette razor blade across the board to take out the black line, whilst leaving the surface smooth.

He'd get his scripts and lay them out roughly in pencil on the art board, working to the writer's instructions. Then he would tighten his pencils, drawing the strip fifty percent larger than the printed version before going to process black inks and therefore black line. Any shading would be produced from watered down black ink, appyling it as a wash.

His later colour work would follow the same process: watered down coloured inks to produce tone after the pencil rendering.

A Noble ending

In the late '50s and early '60s, Noble produced several cowboy strips. First the 'Lone Ranger', and then 'The Range Rider' came



(Above) The mysterious Mr Milner from The Adventures of Black Beauty (Look-In October 1974).

The gigantic space craft Zero X has parked in orbit around the red planet and the command cabin, the Martian Excursion Vehicle detaches to make its run in
Then . . TROUBLE
CAPTAIN PAUL TRAVERS WRESTLES THE CONTROLS OF HIS CRAFT, UNTIL AT LAST THE TORNADO BEGINS TO ABATE
THE MAIN DANGER'S OVER BUT WHAT'S OUR ALTITUDE SIR?
INSTRUMENTS AND
I CAN'T RAISE ZERO X TO GET A FIX ON OUR POSITION. WE'VE NO MEANS OF TELLING EITHER THE DISTANCE OR DIRECTION WE'VE TAKEN
I DON'T KNOW . . THINK THAT DUST CLOUD WAS METALLIC. IT MUST HAVE SPENT THE INSTRUMENTS HAYWIRE
MEANWHILE FAR ABOVE THE RED PLANET, SPACE NAVIGATOR MAJOR NEWMAN, IN SOLE CHARGE OF THE MAIN BODY IS GETTING WORRIED
HELLO ME . . COME IN PLEASE . . CAN YOU HEAR ME . . PAUL ?
IT'S NO USE . . SOMETHING'S HAPPENED TO THEM . . I'D BETTER CALL EARTH ON THE EMERGENCY SET
AT THE GLENN FIELD HEADQUARTERS OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM EXPLORATION CENTRE, READY MESSAGE IS RECEIVED WITH
THE FIRE BEGINS AS IT CLEARLY LAND DOWN, NOW IT'S TWELVE HOURS WITHOUT CONTACT, AND THE MAIN BODY MAKES ITS RETURN TO EARTH?
THAT'S RIGHT . . THE TEAM ABANDONING FOUR BRAVE MEN, BUT WE MUST THINK OF THE PROJECT AS A WHOLE
ZERO X
MAJOR NEWMAN WOULD . . SOME UNKNOWN PERIL ON MARS . . NEWMAN TOO . . THE MAIN BODY . . DOWN FOR A CLOSER LOOK . . NEED TO LOSE A FEW OUNCES

(Above) *Zero X* from *TV21* (Below) Mike's *Captain Scarlet* from *TV21* (June 1968) (Bottom) Watch out - Mother Dench is about! (*Look-In* October 1974).

EVEN AS HE TAKES FLIGHT, ALBERT SEES THE FRONT DOOR FLY OPEN ! AND THERE - CLEAR IN THE MOONLIGHT - A TERRIFYING FIGURE IS REVEALED !

under the Noble pencil. The 'Range Rider' was a popular western on BBC TV and the strip version replaced The 'Lone Ranger' in 1961.

Mike Noble was always working, turning out many strips, most in black and white, some in colour and a few in black, white and one other colour, each strip becoming another discipline, a fresh challenge, another way of learning and improving his art.

When the BBC cancelled The Range Rider, the strip was cancelled too, but Mike had already met someone who would be of greater value in his rising career: Alan Fennell, editor of *TV21*, home of the Gerry Anderson strips.

A Noble Fireball

Noble was already aware of the impact of Gerry Anderson's TV work. *Supercar*, *Fireball XL5* and *Stingray* were being aired and Mike had seen the strips in *TV21* and was impressed. With the ending of western strips like 'The Range Rider' in *TV Comic* in 1964, Noble's only offer of work was a cartoon strip, 'Beetle Bailey'. Noble had never worked on cartoons before, but welcomed the challenge and he also drew 'Popeye' during this period.

Noble learned that Graham Cotton, *TV21*'s 'Fireball XL5' artist had quit the strip and Mike, taking advantage of his friendship with Fennell, took over the strip, using his own understudy to help him meet tight deadlines. Mike then dropped 'Beetle Bailey' in favour of the 'Fireball XL5' work, which was more suited to his talents.

It would take Mike six days to produce two full colour spreads; two on the pencil work, two on the inking and the remainder on the colouring. Fennell encouraged his artists to employ new tricks to make the artwork more effective - explosions bursting from the panels, no hard line around those panels, to use the colour to its full effect.

A Noble future

Noble relished these briefs and, like, Embleton and Bellamy, portrayed the characters as 'real' people. He was supplied with photos of the respective marionettes for likeness: front views, side views, even photos of the back of their heads. He also used photos of the spacecraft, SF hardware and any buildings that may be featured in the series. He also used reference material sent to him from America depicting *NASA* rockets and space suits.

Noble put all this knowledge into the strips, making the hardware as realistic as he was able as the writers' encouraged Noble to use his imagination to the full. They would never fully describe uniforms, a planet's surface or the design of a

spacecraft and instead left it to Mike to visualise the extraordinary Gerry Anderson future.

It was a genre he came to love, especially as he found the work easier than drawing horses and stage coaches.

Noble loved to draw science fiction strips and stayed at *TV21* for many years, producing not only definitive renderings of *Fireball XL5*, but of 'Zero X' and *Captain Scarlet*. Far from being a 'job', Noble's love for these strips and his art shines through, drawing *Fireball XL5* from *TV21* issue 6 straight through to issue 108, 'Zero X' almost the same length, issue 105 through to issue 154 and then later from issue 197 to 241. Then came *Star Trek*, each strip produced to the same professional manner Noble lent all his work.

After this flood of work, Noble moved to *Look-in*, again drawing (in black and white) another Gerry Anderson TV strip in the form of *Space 1999* (though he never actually saw the TV programme!), *FollyFoot*, 'Robin of Sherwood' and 'Black Beauty' (those beautiful horses!) followed and Noble moved away from science fiction to a more 'realistic' side to his art.

Noble times

Just as colour had been phased out of Mike Noble's artwork in the early to middle '70s, so too were the washes he used in his '80s work, especially on his rendition of Worzel Gummidge. Noble decided he would change his style for this work, using rougher textured water colour board and employing black ink and black crayon for the tones. The rough board lent a grittier rendering to the work. Noble then worked on *The Tomorrow People*, *The Man From Atlantis* and later *The Famous Five*, adapted from another TV series on ITV.

In the early 1980s, a Japanese production unit produced their own science-fiction puppet TV epic called *Star Fleet*. Airing in 1982 in the UK, a strip version was licensed by *Look-In*, with Mike Noble as artist.

Mike Noble is now in his seventies and continues to work and produce wonderful comic strips. Like the greats Frank Bellamy, Ron Embleton and Don Lawrence, his work excites and delivers everytime. In years to come, like Bellamy, Embleton and Lawrence, Noble's clean style and impressive body of work will be at the forefront of truly great British comic strip artwork. ●

THE ADVENTURES of Black Beauty
JENNY AND KEVIN COME OUT OF THEIR TRANCE-LIKE STATE TO FIND THEMSELVES IN A DISUSED CELLAR!
SLAMM
WHERE ARE WE? WHAT'S HAPPENED?
THE OLD WOMAN! HER EYES! I-I JUST HAD TO OBEY!
LOOK - THIS IS BEYOND ALL REASON! YOU-YOU CAN'T!
MOTHER DENCH'S WEIRD HYPNOTIC POWERS
MOTHER DENCH DOES WHAT SHE WILL WITH MR KILNER - YOU FORGOT MY POWERS
HEE HEE HEE! OF COURSE I DO YOU YOUNG FOOLS! AND NOW YOU WILL STAY HERE AND STARE AT YOUR FOLLY UNTIL I DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH YOU!
JENNY FEELS PANIC RISING
I'M FRIGHTENED! FRIGHTENED! WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO US?
STEADY JENNY! WE'VE GOT TO TRY AND KEEP OUR HEADS!
THE MAGNIFICENT HORSE GALLOPS BACK TO YORK COTTAGE
THE BRAINS OF THE DOMINATOR SENS TRUTH! BUT YOU HAVE OBVIOUS INTELLIGENCE AND THAT CANNOT BE PERMITTED! ALL INTELLIGENT ONES ARE SPIES!
RUN, LIZ - RUN! THEY'RE GOING TO KILL US!

(Below) ***The Adventures of Black Beauty*****. Beautiful people, not so beautiful people and beautiful horses! (*Look-In* November 1974). (Bottom)** ***Timeslip*** **(Look-In 1971).**

The Crikey! chat

andy capp

By David Robinson

Roger, Roger - The New Men behind Andy Capp

Fifty years old in 2007, Andy was touted as the father of Buster at the outset of that esteemed publication; and there are other interfaces, as we shall see...

When, during the late 1980s, I interviewed the late Reg Smythe, creator of 'Andy Capp' in the *Daily Mirror*, I delicately asked him whether he thought Andy would hang up his cap when Smythe eventually retired. Reg replied that he did not believe Andy would fade from the scene; and for the time being, at least, he has been right.

But Smythe's Andy Capp drawings are still in *The Mirror* every day, aren't they? Despite the increasing number of modern references to scratch cards, mobile phones and the like, surely the style of drawing is still Smythe's?

While Reg left behind a good year's worth of unpublished daily Andy Capps, it is difficult to believe that nearly ten years have now passed since the well-loved cartoonist sadly laid down his pen (in Hartlepool of cancer on 13 June 1998).

What is more, someone has achieved the seemingly impossible; successfully replicating Smythe's Andy so that the transition appears seamless.

Capp and Smythe

Andy's cap, like its similar-sounding owner, is one of the most instantly recognised graphic images in Britain – and in other places! Smythe's diminutive north-easterner has been one of the UK's most successful exports, also achieving the top three in the States and becoming "very big in the Yemen"!

Smythe (real name Reg Smith) quit school at 14 and survived army service before moving to London and taking a day job with the Post Office. Whilst there, he cut his teeth as a cartoonist, freelancing spot cartoons to trade journals: up to sixty contributions per week. With the help of a good agent, Smythe's cartoons eventually found their way into the *Daily Mirror* and the late, lamented *Reveille*, both difficult publications to break into.

'Andy Capp' began in the *Mirror*'s northern edition as an extension of Smythe's daily gag cartoons. The idea took hold, and graduated to the paper's national version in eight months.

Mirror men

When it comes to newspaper strips, the *Daily Mirror* has tended to be the British forerunner. Classic strips

AARON AND I HAVE BEEN GOING OUT FOR EXACTLY A MONTH TODAY!
I CALL IT OUR "KISSY-VERSARY"!
AW! HOW SWEET!
GIVE IT A MONTH – SHE'LL BE CALLING THAT ONE "WHAT-WAS-I-THINKING-VERSARY"
ROGER MAHONEY & ROGER KETTLE

I'LL SEE YOU LATER, PET—I'M JUST GOING DOWN TO THE PUB
ROGER MAHONEY & ROGER KETTLE
YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT WITH THAT CRAZY, WACKY MAN OF MINE...
SOMETIMES HE "GOES DOWN" TO THE PUB... SOMETIMES HE "NIPS OUT" TO THE PUB... SOMETIMES HE "POPS ALONG"...

range from 'Garth' through to Peter O'Donnell's brilliant 'Romeo Brown' (drawn by Alfred Mazure, then James Holdaway) and Bill Tidy's 'The Fosdyke Saga', to 'The Perishers', on which late co-founder Maurice Dodd worked with Bill Mevin until Dodd sadly passed on in 2005.

Apart from Capp, all of these items from that golden era of Mirror strips have petered away during the past twenty years, in favour of less traditional fare such as the somewhat computerised look of the football strip, 'Scorer' (reminiscent of the classic football strip drawing style established in *Tiger* by the late Joe Colqhoun for 'Roy of the Rovers').

From the remaining features, Ken Layson, cartoon and crosswords editor at *The Mirror*, plucked one creator each to replace Smythe, who both wrote and drew 'Andy Capp'. Scotsman Roger Kettle now writes the scripts, while Roger Mahoney - from Emsworth in Hampshire – is the new artist.

'Ken is a fantastic Cartoon Editor,' enthuses Kettle. 'He simply loves cartoons and goes to bat constantly for cartoonists. I owe him a lot – not least for the confidence he showed in my ability to write 'Andy Capp'.'

Beau and Horace

Roger Kettle, born in the Scottish Highlands in 1952, started at *The Mirror* writing 'Horace' (originally 'A Man Called Horace'), a strip based on a comical Lone Ranger lookalike and a send-up of the Richard Harris film title, A Man Called Horse.

Kettle's partner on 'Horace' is another Scot, illustrator Andrew Christine, who also draws Kettle's brilliant earlier creation, 'Beau Peep'.

This luckless legionnaire's Saharan confinement has now managed more than 25 years in the *Daily Star*, despite a brief hiatus a couple of years ago when an accountant recommended "pulling" the Peep strip (until complaints from readers prompted *Star* editors to reinstate Beau).

Kettle met Christine after taking up a journalism apprenticeship in Dundee with D C Thomson, legendary proprietor of a wealth of household names (*The Beano* and *The Dandy* continue to outstrip competitors on UK comics' sales lists). Roger eventually became a sub-editor on DCT's underrated *The Topper*, and among the late comic greats whom he ran across was David Law, self-critical (and largely unsung) creator of 'Dennis the Menace', 'Beryl the Peril' and others. Kettle also singles out Ken Reid, creator of 'Roger the Dodger' and 'Jonah' as a genius.

Roger now finds himself scripting both 'Beau' and 'Horace' six days a week, with 'Andy' managing the same quota, plus Sundays. 'It's not easy,' the writer admits. 'Writing nineteen strips in a week is not a problem, but writing nineteen strips *every* week is! But I'm not complaining. It's a nice way to make a living.'

Whereas Kettle originally learned to write scripts 'longhand', detailing in text the contents of each panel as well as the word balloons, he now does so visually, sketching out the episodes in rough. He learned early on, from the work of late, great practitioners such as Charles Schulz, of 'Peanuts' fame, and Don Martin in *MAD Magazine*, that a facial expression can be worth a thousand words. It sometimes irks the artist that Roger's dashed-off version may capture a required look more readily than a carefully executed pen-line (a common illustrative complaint!). Empathy is such that Roger can see exactly how the artist's depiction of a particular character will react in a given situation.

Kettle works from an office within his house in the suburbs of Dundee. He agrees that writing is a solitary profession, but 'I've been doing it for 25 years, so I'm used to it. I'd find it very difficult now to work in an office, surrounded by other people. My wife works, so

SHE SAID I WAS OBSESSED WITH FOOTBALL AND THAT SHE WAS LEAVING ME...
ROGER MAHONEY & ROGER KETTLE
SO I ASKED HER TO SIT DOWN AND TALK ABOUT THE WHOLE THING RATIONALLY
WHAT DID SHE SAY?
I DON'T KNOW— THE SECOND HALF STARTED

I WON'T BE ABLE TO PLAY IN THE POOL TEAM TONIGHT, ANDY
MY WIFE'S JUST GONE INTO LABOUR – I'M OFF TO THE HOSPITAL NOW!
TO THINK I WAS GOING TO MAKE HIM CAPTAIN – I'M GLAD I FOUND OUT HOW SELFISH HE IS!
ROGER MAHONEY & ROGER KETTLE

I'm around during school holidays. Therefore, a lot of the time, it's not that solitary!'

Summer hols can be difficult to snatch, and rarely extend beyond a week; RK counterbalances this by making sure that the trips are good ones. While neither of the Kettle offspring is a staunch cartoon fan, Roger's teenage daughter has become a useful barometer of whether an idea "works", or not.

Roger Mahoney

The new artist for 'Andy' also draws his rhyming partner, 'Mandy' (formerly 'Mandy Capp'), in the same paper.

Roger Mahoney, born in Portsmouth in 1933, studied art and design at the Southern College of Art. Early inspirations included Barry Appleby and 'The Gambols' in the *Daily Express*, which also introduced Roger to Giles, Osbert Lancaster and other cartoonists from the same paper. 'All of whom I consistently bombarded with questions,' adds Roger M, speaking of his early grounding as a cartoonist.

He later broke into *The Mirror*, first with pocket cartoons, then through Syndication International who were servicing his daily cartoon strip, 'Sammy', and a daily cartoon panel 'Agony is...' to the *Daily Record* and overseas papers.

Mahoney lives in a converted 1900s fever hospital in West Sussex, where his studio is a former mortuary! The whole Mahoney Mansions resides in five and a half acres of ancient woodland. He works mainly in pen and ink, and uses anything to colour his work in, including a computer. He relies upon attention to detail and good old-fashioned elbow grease to get the effects he wants.

'I think Ken Layson felt that, because I had taken over 'The Gambols' successfully, the requirements for drawing Andy were fairly similar,' Roger points out. 'I had always been a fan of Capp, and admired the artwork immensely. The economy of line and use of space were so disciplined.'

Mahoney's normal workload is to draw and letter four cartoon strips a day, including two non-Mirror items. 'I produce around twelve to eighteen jokes per week and draw up six of the best,' says Roger. 'Drawing Andy slows my normal drawing speed down from the speed of light to Mach 1! It is always easier to draw your own characters – which should flow off the end of your pen like handwriting.'

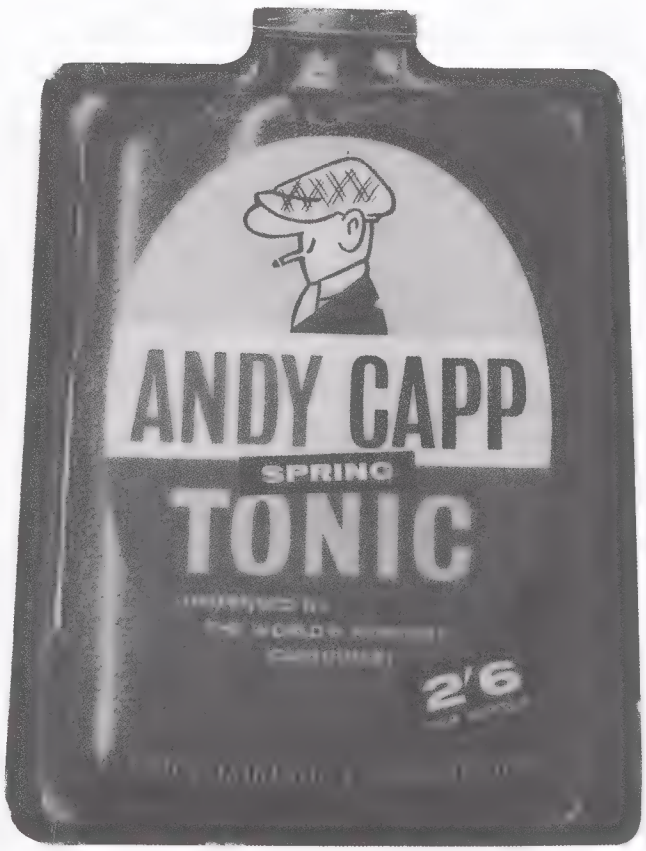
More Kettle

For Roger Kettle, taking over Andy Capp 'was a daunting task, as the other strips I've written over the years have been my own creations. Reg was from the North East of England, and I'm from Scotland; but I really don't think there's much of a difference in cultures; although I do write the word "pet" a lot!

'I've tried not to stray from the "feel" of Reg's Andy, other than the fights which used to take place with Flo.' These simply don't work in this day and age and Reg Smythe himself was toning this aspect down, along with the "softening" of Andy's extra-marital pursuits and the elimination of smoking from the strip.

'Reg had one particular touch which I love,' says Kettle. 'When Florrie left the house or the pub, he drew her putting on her gloves. Who would bother doing that? It's simple, effective and beautifully observed.'

'Being asked to write 'Andy Capp' was a great privilege,' Kettle concludes. 'He is, after all and without a doubt, the most famous and most successful British cartoon strip character of all time. I hope to do it justice.' ●



Described as "Britain's master spy", Captain Phantom parachuted into the pages of Knockout in issue 702 (9 August 1952) and fought the Nazi and Japanese menace through seven thrilling adventures before ceding his place on the centre pages to the space-roaming tales of the Family Rollinson.

Captain Phantom

The Man of a Thousand Disguises

By Steve Holland

CAPTAIN PHANTOM—
The Man of a Thousand Disguises
AT AN R.A.F. FIGHTER BASE IN THE EARLY DAYS OF THE FIGHTING
BLEEP
CAPTAIN PHANTOM, AFTER BEING SHOT UP BY A GERMAN AIR BASE, IS SHOT DOWN OVER FRANCE WHILE ESCAPING IN A NAZI SCHEME. HE JOINS FORCES WITH A FRENCH FAMILY AND SETS OFF FOR THE CHANNEL COAST IN A GERMAN ARMOURED CAR. THE NAZIS TRIED TO STOP THEM BY THROWING A BARRIER ACROSS THE ROAD BUT WITH GUILE AND DARING THE ACE OF SPIES MANAGED TO BREAK THROUGH—
LEAVING THE SHATTERED ROAD BARRIER BEHIND THEM, CAPTAIN PHANTOM AND HIS COMPANIONS DRIVE SWIFTLY TOWARDS THE COASTAL VILLAGE OF DUVAL IN THE CAPTURED ARMOURED CAR—
WE'LL BE IN DUVAL, SOON— CAPTAIN PHANTOM!
YES, BUT I'VE AN IDEA THOSE JERRIES BACK THERE WILL HAVE WARNED THEIR CHUMS THAT WE ARE COMING!
QUIETLY THE MASTER SPY OPENED THE DOOR TO THE ANTECHAMBER—
YOU ARE THE MAYOR OF DUVAL? THE COMMANDANT ORDERS YOU TO COME TO HIM AT ONCE!
VERY WELL, SERGEANT!
DIVING STRAIGHT DOWN, HE RAMMED HIS MACHINE INTO THE BRITHIKE—
AS THE PARACHUTE OF HIM WHOM SAW DOWN OVER THE JUNGLE JAPANESE TROOPS WATCHED—
CONCEALED IN THE UNDERGROWTH—
SO OUR MEN HAVE ESCAPED!

Captain Phantom was the Knockout's first war hero in strip form, preceded only by 'The Laughing Spy', a text story that had appeared briefly in 1940. Written by John Newton Chance, the latter spy had been graced with the name Red Sword, who had previously appeared in the story paper War Thriller.

'Laughing spy' was another epithet given to Captain Phantom whose chief joy was to outwit the Axis forces whenever he could.

Secret spy

As the strip opens, the mysterious British spy is already a legend throughout Europe. The year is 1942, and Squadron-Leader Daunton is returning to an aerodrome in East Anglia after special service in the Middle East when he hears that his old friend, Flying Officer Ted Raleigh, has been missing for a month. Contacting R.A.F. Intelligence, Daunton learns that Raleigh had been sent on a special mission to discover the secrets of a new German Anti-Aircraft gun.

Daunton returns to his tiny London flat and proceeds to change… he is, in truth, Captain Phantom, a British agent so secret that even the intelligence services are unaware of his real identity!

Captain Phantom always works alone, believing "Every man was an enemy—until proved a friend," although his superiors have such confidence in him that he can call on any of the fighting services for assistance without notice.

Apart from a deadly sword hidden in a walking stick—and that only for the first story—Captain Phantom's chief weapon is his ability to quickly and completely disguise himself. Although not the subject of any discussion in the strips themselves, Phantom also proves himself

EVEN AS THE FLIGHT LIEUTENANT REACHED THE TEMPLE HE HEARD THE JAPS RUNNING ACROSS THE CLEARING --
THERE'S NO TIME TO DESTROY THE PLANS! I'LL HIDE THEM IN THIS GRINNING IDOL AND TRUST TO LUCK THAT THE JAPS WON'T FIND THEM!
A FEW MOMENTS LATER, JIM JOHNSON WAS TAKEN PRISONER BY THE JAPS AND LED AWAY FROM THE TEMPLE --
WE NO FIND PLANS BUT COLONEL YUKUSI MAKE BRITISHER TALK!
THEY'LL GET NOTHING FROM ME! I ONLY HOPE OUR PEOPLE REALISE I DIDN'T GET THROUGH!
SO VITAL WERE THE PLANS THAT AS SOON AS THEY WERE KNOWN TO BE MISSING -- R.A.F. INTELLIGENCE IN LONDON WERE INFORMED AND ACTION WAS TAKEN IMMEDIATELY. A TALL SQUADRON LEADER WAS CALLED TO HIS CHIEF AND GIVEN SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS.
HAD THE SENIOR OFFICER BUT KNOWN IT, HE HAD BEEN TALKING TO CAPTAIN PHANTOM, FOR SQUADRON LEADER DAUNTON HIMSELF WAS THE MAN OF A THOUSAND DISGUISES. THE MASTER SPY, WHO WAS HATED BY ALL BRITAIN'S ENEMIES ON LEAVING HIS CHIEF, DAUNTON WENT TO HIS FLAT AND BEGAN TO PREPARE FOR HIS TRIP TO THE EAST --
HERE'S HOPING I CAN FOOL THE JAPS AS I DO THE NAZIS.
A FEW DAYS LATER -- ON THE SAME AIRSTRIP AS JIM JOHNSON SET OUT FROM -- CAPTAIN PHANTOM RECEIVED HIS FINAL ORDERS ---
YOU'LL BE DROPPED NEAR THE CHINDU RIVER. MAKE YOUR WAY TO THE SPOT MARKED ON THE MAP, WHERE YOU WILL BE CONTACTED BY AN OLD ALLY OF OURS -- GENERAL HOO SUNG. HE WILL HELP YOU IN ANYWAY HE CAN. GOOD LUCK. CAPTAIN PHANTOM!
WHEN THE AGE OF SPIES REACHED THE RIVER AT THE SPOT MARKED ON THE MAP, NOT A WISH COULD WE SEE OF THE MAN HE WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET --
HERE'S THE SPOT! NOW WHERE'S THE GENERAL?
AS CAPTAIN PHANTOM WATCHED, THE QUIET RIPPLING OF THE RIVER WAS DISTURBED BY A THRASHING SOUND -- LIKE CROCODILES FIGHTING.
THIS PLACE GIVES ME THE CREEPS! THE SOONER OLD HOO SUNG SHOWS UP THE BETTER!
SUDDENLY UP FROM THE BURGING WATERS A GIANT MACHINE, SHAPED LIKE A LARGE METAL SPHERE APPEARED --
BY GLORY! WHAT ON EARTH!

fluent in many languages: German, French, Burmese, Japanese and even the language of the South American republic of El Pesos; in a matter of seconds, he can mimic the voice and mannerisms of anyone he meets.

Making it up

Captain Phantom is the ultimate actor. "I have to be a man of a thousand disguises," he explains to a Dutch newspaperman in episode two. "My life depends on it. I am never without my little make up box. It is my best friend."

The make up box allows him to change his features so precisely that even a close colleague cannot see through the disguise. Small, waterproof and curiously concealed (the box is never removed from him when he is taken prisoner), the make up box allows him to disguise himself as a national of any country in whatever brief time he has available.

His make-up abilities extend to others and he is even able to convincingly disguise a young Burmese girl as a Japanese commander to fool the enemy.

His powers of disguise are matched only by such bravery that hard-bitten Captains of the Royal Navy gasp "Gosh—Captain Phantom!" and hardened Commandos mutter "Gosh! He's a wizard!" Confident that his disguises will not be penetrated, Phantom has no fear of being dropped into the heart of enemy territory or strolling recklessly into a secret meeting with nothing more than his sense of humour to protect him. He was not the "laughing spy" for nothing – as he says to a German sentry after stealing his uniform and leaving him tied to a tree: "Sorry to leave you in your underwear. No doubt your rage will keep you warm." And with a cheery, "So long," he melts away into the night.

Action man

These occasional one-liners are a precursor to the kind of thing one now expects of James Bond, and some of Captain Phantom's stunts would not be out of place in a Bond movie. In the third story, he rides a motorcycle after a German transport plane and flings himself at the spars of the rising undercarriage. Capturing the plane he is set upon by German fighters yet manages to land the plane on one wheel.

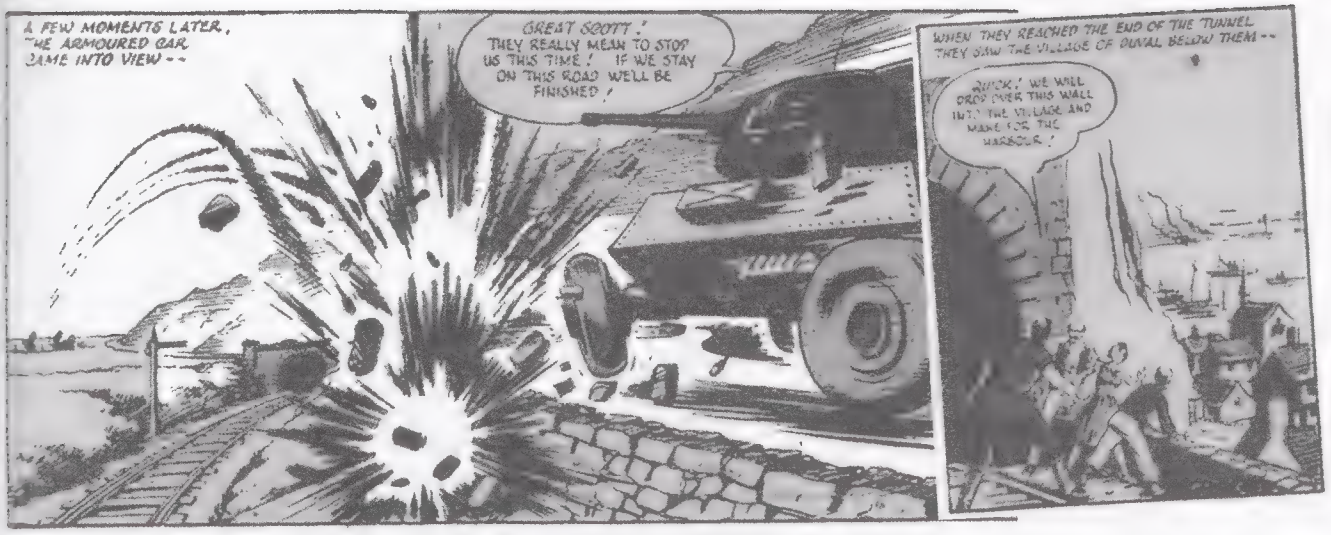
An even more potentially terminal event was when he parachuted from a bomber only for a chute to wrap itself around the tail of a German fighter. Unable to control the plane, the German pilot plummets into a lake, dragging Captain Phantom after him. The plane smashes apart on impact but, with split second timing, Captain Phantom releases his harness, drops lightly into the lake and swims ashore.

Despite this, the Captain is no superhero. His great failing is to leave the enemies he is impersonating to be discovered, usually at the most inopportune moment, so that his disguise is penetrated; this he does consistently throughout all seven of his adventures, leading to some hair-raising escapes, not the least of which was during a secret German conference when he had to leap out of a window eighty feet above the ground, his death prevented by a Nazi flag jutting out of the Gestapo headquarters in the opposite building.

Inventive

Surrounded by enemies, Captain Phantom can always find a friend, whether it is a family of French farmers or native workmen in Burma. One of his closest allies is a mysterious inventor by the name of General Hoo Sung, a somewhat stereotypical oriental who is always begging the pardon of his comrade for every humble act he performs.

Hoo Sung has created the Rolling Sphere, a monstrous armour clad weapon bristling with pom pom cannons which has a useful mechanical arm with the


A FEW MOMENTS LATER, THE ARMOURED CAR CAME INTO VIEW --
GREAT SCOTT ! THEY REALLY MEAN TO STOP US THIS TIME ! IF WE STAY ON THIS ROAD WE'LL BE FINISHED !
WHEN THEY REACHED THE END OF THE TUNNEL THEY SAW THE VILLAGE OF DUVAL BELOW THEM --
QUICK ! WE WILL DROP OVER THIS WALL INTO THE VILLAGE AND MAKE FOR THE HARBOUR !

strength to pick up a boat or pull the Sphere up a cliff face.

Having a machine like the Rolling Sphere at his disposal is vital to Captain Phantom in some situations since the Nazis are always on the verge of creating their own weapons of mass destruction, ranging from walking gunships known as sand-spiders to undersea aircraft carriers.

The final strip, set shortly after the war, sees a British company creating a giant jet bomber capable of flying halfway round the world to deliver its nuclear payload.

The creative mind behind these inventions—not just the weapons but the storylines themselves—was Ron Clark, himself formerly of the R.A.F., who had worked as a scriptwriter for G.B. Animation in the late 1940s. When the company closed down in 1949, he soon established himself at the Amalgamated Press, writing scripts for *Knockout*, *Sun* and *Comet* which were often drawn by other ex-animators—including Eric Bradbury, Ron Smith, Reg Parlett and Harry Hargreaves. Although not the creator of Captain Phantom, it was his scripts—often drawn out in rough rather than the usual typescript—that sent the Captain on his wildest adventures.

Artistic

The strip's main artist was Graham Coton, whose artistic training at Goldsmith's College had been interrupted by his own wartime service in the R.A.F. After demobilisation, he had applied to G.B. Animation but chosen not to take up their offer of work, returning to Goldsmith's instead. In 1950, obliged to find work, he had started to draw Kit Carson for the *Cowboy Comics Library*, although his interest in cars and aircraft was better served in *Knockout*, drawing two Sexton Blake yarns before being offered Captain Phantom.

After four adventures and eight months, Mike Western took over the strip for a single 12-week story. Western, unlike Coton, had accepted work with G.B. Animation and had then worked for Halas & Batchelor on *Animal Farm* before he rejoined former colleagues Clark and Bradbury working on *Knockout*. Graham Coton subsequently returned for the final five months of the strip.

The strip was clearly popular as, after only a few weeks in black & white, it moved to the prestigious centre colour pages. Colour is, perhaps, a misnomer as Phantom's adventures were not always enhanced by the red overlay. Poorly printed, the colour didn't always line up with the drawings and scraps of red speckled the printed artwork, adding little to the reality of the strip as everyone ran around in red uniforms, drove red vehicles and flew red planes. Even in the snowy wastes of Norway, the Commando group supposedly disguised as a Nazi ski patrol were given overcoats tinted in red by the overenthusiastic colourist.

Despite the crudity of the drawing—even artists with a fine future ahead of them have to learn their trade—and the patchy colouring, 'Captain Phantom' was an enjoyable romp. Four of the seven stories were resized and reprinted in the pages of *Thriller Picture Library* several years later with Captain Phantom donning his last disguise—and renamed 'Spy 13'.

Historical

The Captain Phantom tales are important for two reasons. Firstly, they marked a move away from the historical swashbuckling stories that had filled *Knockout* for many years, giving readers a more modern swashbuckler with a wartime setting. Although not a first, since the Second World War had been mined extensively in text form in comics and story papers from the moment Neville Chamberlain made his fateful announcement, but certainly one of the first in picture story format.

Secondly, it introduced elements of the fantastic that were to inspire some of the finest stories to appear in comics of the 1950s and 1960s.

It was still a long journey from 'Captain Phantom' to 'Kelly's Eye' (which appeared in Knockout *ten years later), but the first hints were there in the super-weapons created on both sides of the conflict and Captain Phantom's own "Gosh!" – provoking abilities. Given the scarcity of the original comics it is no wonder that he has been forgotten… making it a pleasure to have been able to shine the spotlight, albeit briefly, on the mysterious Squadron-Leader Daunton, a.k.a. Britain's most extraordinary spy, Captain Phantom.* ●

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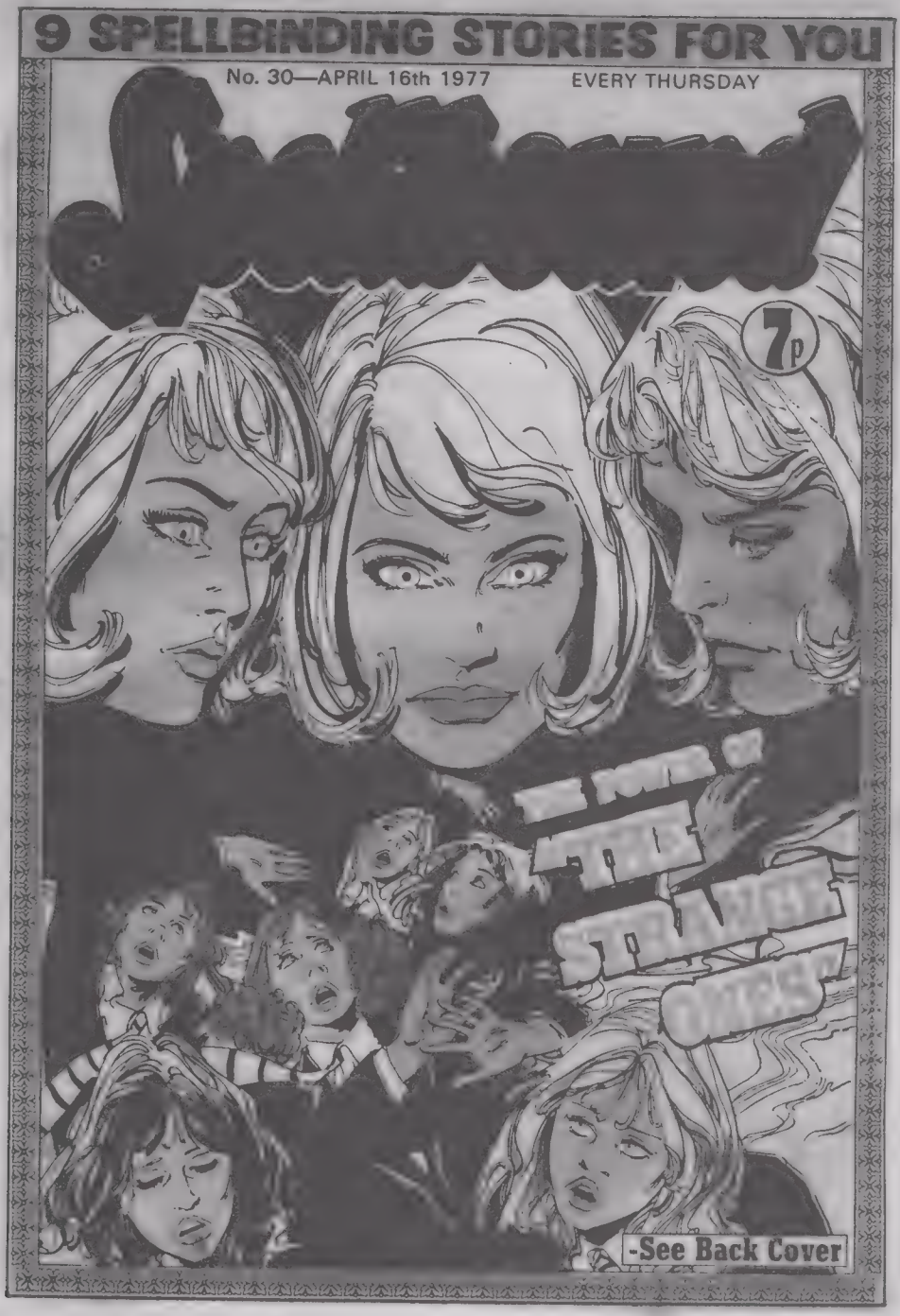
Let's Look at...

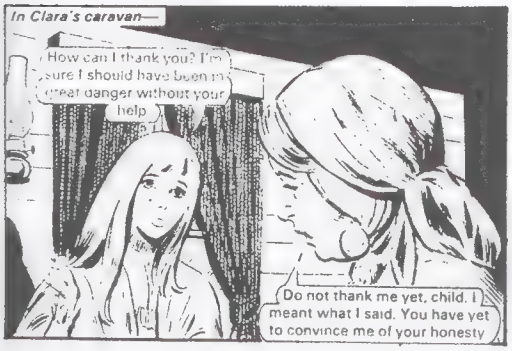


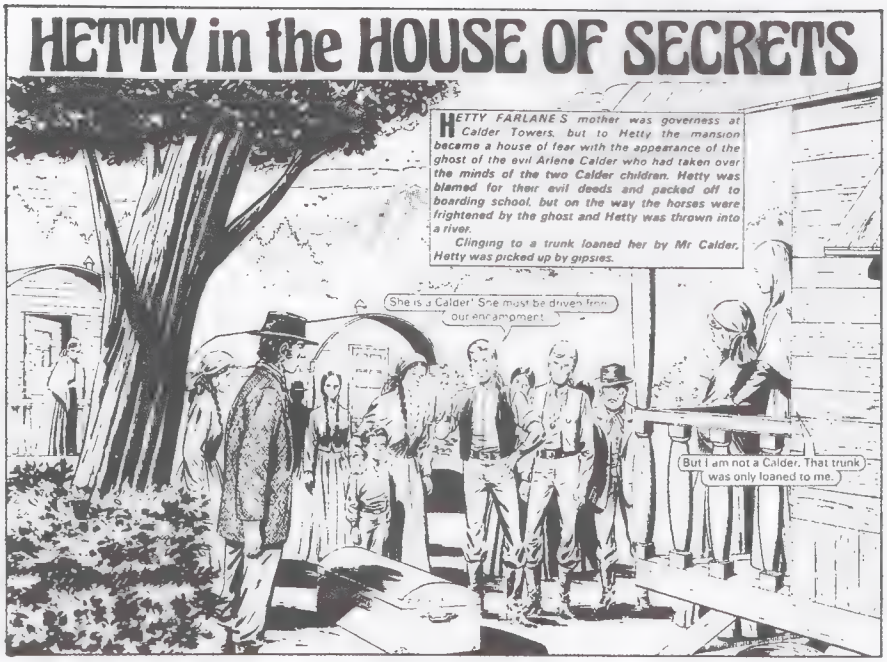
By Brian M Clarke

DC Thomson's entry into the spooky girls' comic genre lasted for an enchanting 69 issues. It left behind some fond memories for girls (and Supercats!) of a certain age … Spellbound *was launched 25 Sept 1976 and merged with* Debbie Comic *21 Jan 1978 (issue 258). The first issue came with a free Mystic Sun Pendant and introduced readers to sinister-sounding stories such as 'When The Mummy Walks', 'Spectre from The Flame', 'Nightmare', 'I Don't Want To Be A Witch' and the rather strange 'The Haunting of Laura Lee'. Not everything was spooky, however, and issue one also saw the start of space adventurer series 'Supercats'. Over the years dozens of strips came and went – read on to catch a flavour of Britain's first girlie spook comic.*

Hetty in the House of Secrets

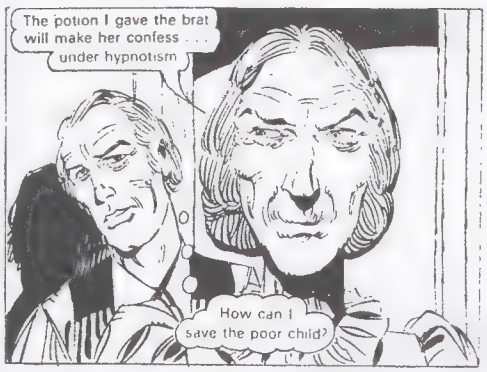
"Hetty Farlane's mother was governess at Calder Towers, but to Hetty the mansion became a house of fear with the appearance of the ghost of the evil Arlene Calder who had taken over the minds of the two Calder children."


In Clara's caravan—
How can I thank you? I'm sure I should have been in great danger without your help.
Do not thank me yet, child. I meant what I said. You have yet to convince me of your honesty.


HETTY in the HOUSE OF SECRETS
HETTY FARLANE'S mother was governess at Calder Towers, but to Hetty the mansion became a house of fear with the appearance of the ghost of the evil Arlene Calder who had taken over the minds of the two Calder children. Hetty was blamed for their evil deeds and packed off to boarding school, but on the way the horses were frightened by the ghost and Hetty was thrown into a river.
Clinging to a trunk loaned her by Mr Calder, Hetty was picked up by gipsies.
She is a Calder! She must be driven from our encampment!
But I am not a Calder. That trunk was only loaned to me.

Beware the Mystery Dolls

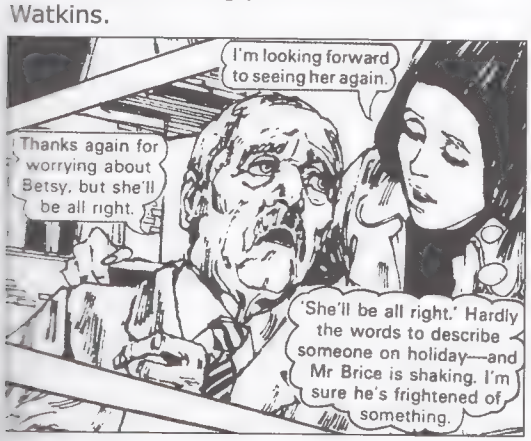
Orphan Vicky Martin has been sent to live in an eerie wax museum belonging to her frightening guardian Madame Venner. It isn't long until Vicky discovers that Venner can bring her weird waxworks to life – with deadly consequences.



BEWARE THE MYSTERY DOLLS
The orphan brat and that grocer's boy are in this together! I'm sure they know the truth! She caused him to bring that policeman here!
ORPHAN Vicky Martin lived at the eerie wax museum belonging to her guardian, Madame Venner, in Victorian London. Vicky soon learned that Madame Venner could bring the wax dolls she made to terrifying life and use them as deadly instruments of revenge. Madame Venner suspected that Vicky had discovered her secret and was working against her, helped by the grocer's delivery-boy, Paul Cook.

Whatever Became of Betsy?

Sally Blair's best-friend Betsy Holbrook suddenly went away and Sal is determined to find out what has become of her. Betsy's grand-dad has told Sally that his niece is on holiday but Sal's suspicions have been aroused by the mysterious and – let's be frank, ugly – house-servant Watkins.

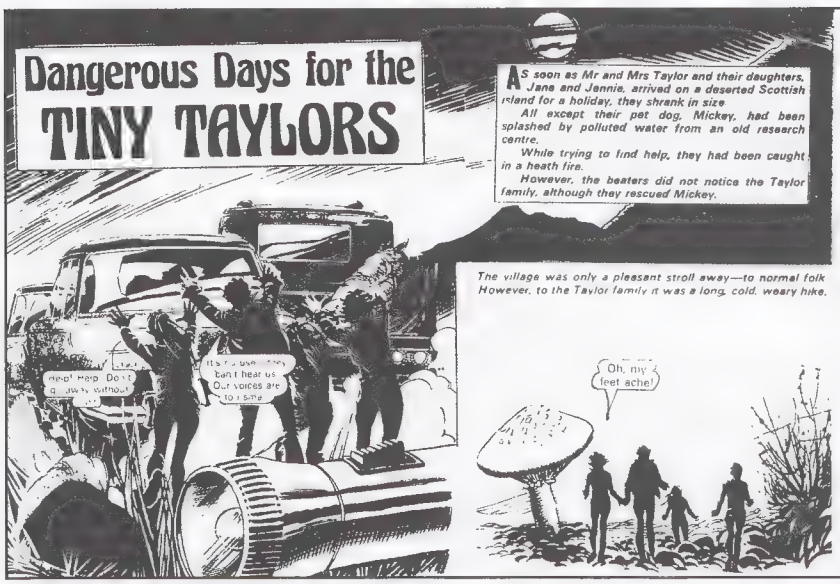

I'm looking forward to seeing her again.
Thanks again for worrying about Betsy, but she'll be all right.
'She'll be all right.' Hardly the words to describe someone on holiday—and Mr Brice is shaking. I'm sure he's frightened of something.

THE SLEEPING PLANET
Returning from a routine visit to the planet Merrigon, Supercats were enjoying a half hour's rest, when suddenly...
Listen to this girls!
Wait till we've finished lunch Helen. These Merrigon lantern-fruits are delicious!
SUPERCATS, crew of spaceship "Lynx," are the pride of Moonbase 4 space station. Helen Miller captains the girls. Hercula has incredible strength. Electra can generate electricity from her fingertips and Fauna can alter her body colouring like a chameleon.

Supercats

The knockout strip that put the SF into Spellbound Fiction. Visually stunning artwork from one of the Spanish studios adds a dynamic open page design to the comic. The Supercats are four girls – Hercula, Fauna, Electra, Helen – in a super-science spaceship (The Kitten, what else) become one of the most popular fetaures of the comic. They even had their own Supercats' Club. Mixing science fiction, pop fashion and friendship proved a winner for the Supercats.

Electra operated the laboratory's music system.
Loud music might keep us awake while we're working.
Hercula's answer to keeping awake was even more breath-taking.


Dangerous Days for the TINY TAYLORS
AS soon as Mr and Mrs Taylor and their daughters, Jane and Jennie, arrived on a deserted Scottish island for a holiday, they shrank in size.
All except their pet dog, Mickey, had been splashed by polluted water from an old research centre.
While trying to find help, they had been caught in a heath fire.
However, the beaters did not notice the Taylor family, although they rescued Mickey.
The village was only a pleasant stroll away—to normal folk. However, to the Taylor family it was a long, cold, weary hike.
Help! Help! Don't go away without us!
Oh, my feet ache!

Dangerous Days for the Tiny Taylors

This strip wasn't the best advertisement for a holiday in Scotland – "As soon as Mr and Mrs Taylor and their daughters Jane and Jennie arrived on a deserted Scottish island for a holiday, they shrank in size." (It was the polluted water.)

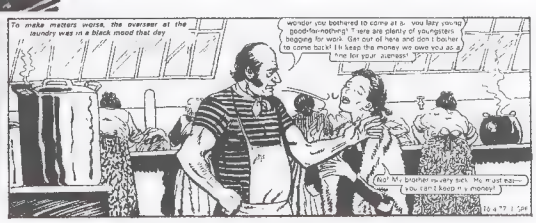
It was unusual for Spellbound to have a strip that didn't focus entirely in female leads (Mr. Taylor tended to do a lot of the thinking) but it was an effective, if derivative, piece of action adventuring.

AN ANGEL IS NEVER LATE
In the slums of nineteenth century London, young Sally Putnam was both breadwinner and mother to her crippled brother—not an easy task under any circumstances--

Man of Mystery

A series of one or two page self-contained stories. Or sometimes one-and-a-half pages. Most were silly with supposed ironic endings. Once you read a couple, however, you tended to know the ending by about panel six. The nasty man forcing the poor little girl into making vat after vat of porridge all through the night was only going to end up in one place, wasn't he!

Originally under the banner of the story teller Damian Drake, it was renamed from issue 24.

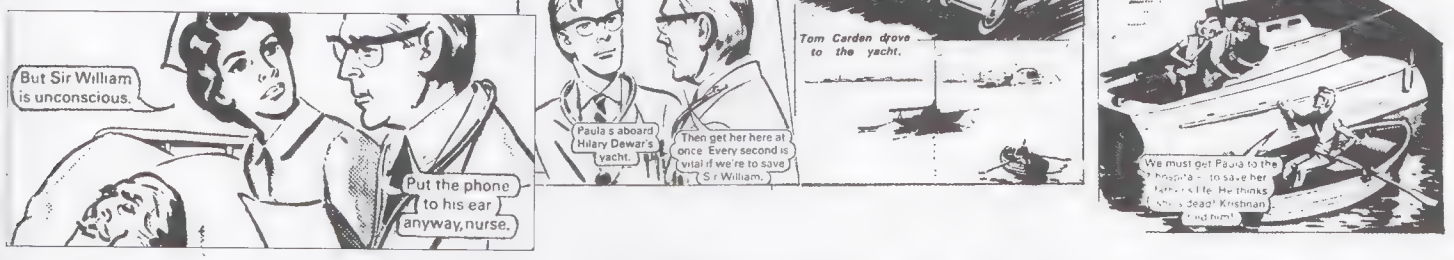

To make matters worse, the overseer at the laundry was in a black mood that day
I wonder you bothered to come at all, you lazy young good-for-nothing! There are plenty of youngsters begging for work. Get out of here and don't bother to come back! I'll keep the money we owe you as a fine for your lateness!
No! Mr. Brother is very sick. He must have
You can't keep it a penny!

Paula

Complete the following sentence. "Paula Spencer, a brilliant young violinist, is terrified of..."

Of what? Zombies? The dark? Being left alone in a creepy old house to look after her mentally unstable father? None of the above. "Paula Spencer, a brilliant young violinist, is terrified of wasps."

Paula now has to overcome her fear of wasps as she struggles to once again play the violin.


Paula
PAULA SPENCER, a brilliant young violinist, is terrified of wasps, after they caused a motor accident in which her father, Sir William, was seriously injured.
Mahsud Krishnan, her tutor, is helping Paula to play again, as her left hand was injured in the crash.
Sir William believes that Paula's musical career is destroyed and has lost his will to live.
Hilary Dewar takes Paula away to stay on her yacht, safe from the wasps that always seem to follow Paula, but Krishnan tells Sir William that Paula's bicycle has been found wrecked and that she is believed to be dead!
But Dr Carden, a friend of Hilary's, knew that Paula was safe.
Paula's aboard Hilary Dewar's yacht.
Then get her here at once. Every second is vital if we're to save Sir William.
Tom Carden drove to the yacht.
Tom — what's up?
We must get Paula to the hospital — to save her father's life. He thinks she's dead! Krishnan found him!
But Sir William is unconscious.
Put the phone to his ear anyway, nurse.

Zodiac Girl

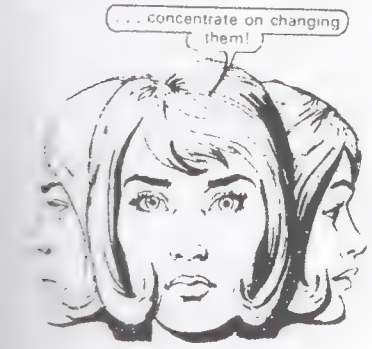
Fashion, boutiques and astrology are involved in this tale of star-crossed business partners and the witchy goings on of Diana's crippled and crazed Aunt Cassandra.

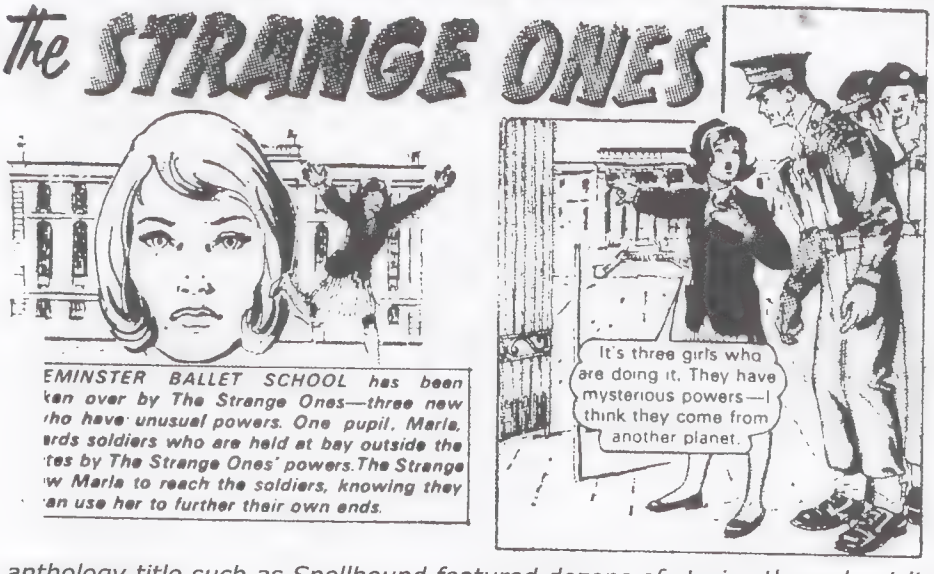
ZODIAC GIRL
BRILLIANT young fashion designer Diana Morris believed that boutique owner Emma Barton had stolen one of her designs and sold it.
On the advice of astrologer Leona Starr, Diana left the Bartons' employ and went to work for Merimodes Fashions.
Emma was innocent, however, and had arrived at the home Diana shared with her unpleasant aunt, to prove it.
Don't get upset, Aunt! We may have wronged Emma and her mother. Emma thinks she can prove that they didn't steal my design...
Diana — I feel faint! Help me, Diana!
Emma Barton will trick you again with her false explanations. She'll say anything to win you back to design for her wretched boutique!
Emma only wants to clear her name! — I can't go back to the Boutique I work for. Merimodes now!!!

The Strange Ones

"Harleminster Ballet School has been taken over by The Strange Ones – three new arrivals who have unusual powers..."

One of the few stories to feature villainous girls as the antagonists. With obvious overtones of The Midwich Cuckoos, it never-the-less built towards several good suspenseful moments.




the STRANGE ONES
EMINSTER BALLET SCHOOL has been ken over by The Strange Ones—three new who have unusual powers. One pupil, Maria, rds soldiers who are held at bay outside the tes by The Strange Ones' powers. The Strange w Maria to reach the soldiers, knowing they an use her to further their own ends.
It's three girls who are doing it. They have mysterious powers—I think they come from another planet.

An anthology title such as Spellbound featured dozens of stories throughout its life. Our brief Look At... is intended to give you a good feel for the title. If you want to know more – well, that's why they have comic and book fairs and the internet. Happy hunting! ●

Countdown ... Resumes Next Week!

By Stephen Poppitt

February 1971 saw the launch of a glossy newcomer to the British comics market, one with a strong emphasis on science fiction: *Countdown*.

The publishers, Polystyle, also produced the successful, but more juvenile, *TV Comic*. The new title mimicked the *TV Comic* format, which had also been used successfully by the Gerry Anderson inspired publication, *TV21*, in that it featured only strips that were based on television shows.

3 – 2 – 1

Countdown would later be known as *TV Action and Countdown*, and later still as just *TV Action*. Throughout its publication life, all its strips were based on TV shows, or in some cases on feature films.

The big difference between *Countdown* and its nearest rival, *TV21*, was that the strips in *Countdown* were not restricted to the output of a particular television company.

The new comic came with a new price, namely five new pence. In those still essentially pre-decimal days, this meant it really cost a shilling; quite a price hike compared to almost every other comic on the market. Most comics cost only 7d (3p) in 1971, so this was rather a shock for the buyer's nervous system.

In addition, *Countdown* only offered a meager 20 pages for its one shilling cover price, at a time when most other comics were 32 pages. This was doubtful economics, because *Countdown* was thus almost twice the price of most of its competitors but only two thirds the pagination, the combination of which would undermine the viability of the new publication from the outset.

On the plus side, however, it was full of colour. Prior to this, only *TV21* had offered so much colour. And *Countdown* also featured a strong use of photographs, a lot of them in colour too, which was another innovation 'borrowed' from *TV21*.

Aside from its impressive production values, however, *Countdown* suffered

(Right) Leslie Branton did a great job on the artwork for Hawii Five-O (TV Action 70).

A very special *Cokey!* thanks goes to Pete Nichols and Phil Satterley for helping research the visuals for this article.

(Above)This wonderful Dr Who spread from Countdown 45 was drawn by long time comics collaborator Gerry Haylock.

a major distribution problem, which nearly killed it off before it began. The first four issues were not properly distributed, so were very hard to find. Thereafter, random issues suffered the same problem; and this persisted for the first six months.

Space shot

The comic's 1971 launch coincided with the real-life Apollo moon missions, which fostered a great deal of interest in the space-race. As a result, a lot of factual features on the space missions appeared in the early issues, accompanied by a large number of photographs, even if many of these were in black-and-white. The real-life space missions had the front cover spot on the first issue, and sporadically after that for several months.

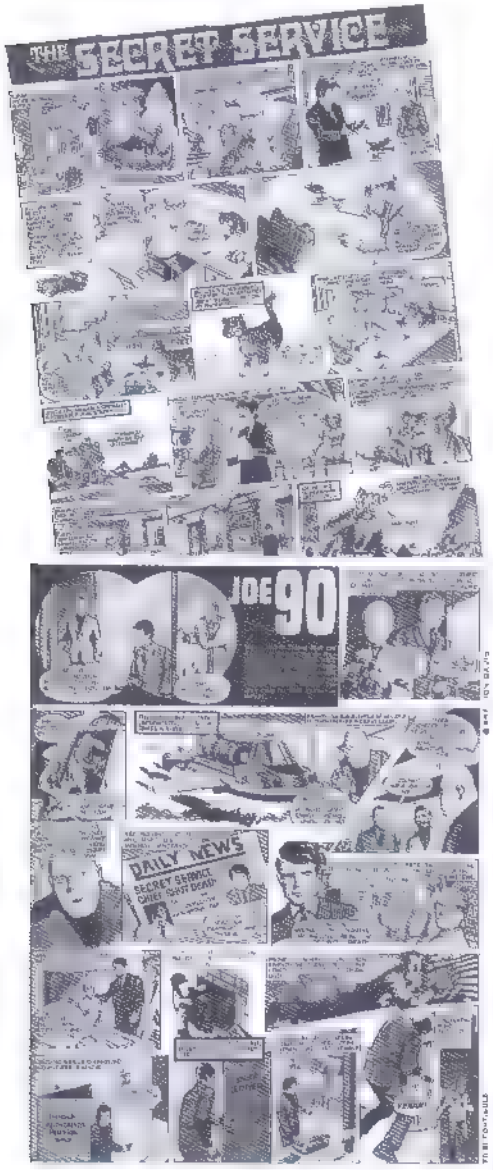
Countdown drew its title from the science fiction strip of the same name, drawn by John Burns, which was a major feature of the comic. The spacecraft and spacesuit designs in the strip were based on the 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and the strip was printed in colour throughout. It told of man's first deep space mission, travelling in a spaceship named 'Countdown' – a spitting image of the spaceship 'Discovery' in the film.

The name of the ship was contrived, to justify the title of both the strip and the comic; but not jarringly so. The most significant aspect of the strip was that it was based, visually at least, on a film and was the only strip in the comic that was not directly based on a TV programme.

As part of the count-down theme, all the ship's crew had number-designations: Captain Marc Zero, Bella One, Grant Two, Thelma Three, Felix Four, and Yoko Five. In the story, the *Countdown* crew have discovered intelligent alien life, and the seventh member of the ship's crew was an

(Above) John Burns' stunning artwork from the title strip, Countdown 15.

(Above): Italian artist Marco Capaldi shows his illustrative style of Robert Vaughn, star of the Protectors (TV Action 131).
(Below): A different style, but the same result: classic British artwork (Countdown 4, artist unknown).



(Above) Jon Davies (Countdown 4).

alien, Bill, who was travelling back with them as the first alien ambassador to the Earth. Of course his real name was not actually Bill, but that was the nearest the ship's crew could get to pronouncing it!

The story began with the ship returning to the solar system after a lengthy voyage, and discovering that a military dictatorship has seized power on Earth. On learning of Countdown's return, the dictator launches a flight of deep space missiles to destroy them; and only the strange abilities of the alien, Bill, saves them.

It is decided to use the alien technology provided by Bill to transport one of the ship's personnel to the Moon, to try and win support among the lunar colonists for the establishment of a base to fight back against dictator Costra and his Z-Men.

The strip developed into a struggle between the ship's crew, in their hiding place among the asteroid belt, and Costra's forces on the Moon; with the crew receiving sporadic help from disaffected colonists.

Who goes there?

One of the main strips in *Countdown* was based on the BBC's *Doctor Who* TV series, which at that time starred Jon Pertwee; and the strip accordingly depicted Pertwee's Doctor. Polystyle already held the necessary licence to use *Doctor Who*, and a strip based on the series had been running in *TV Comic*, depicting Patrick Troughton's Doctor.

With art by Harry Lindfield, the new strip was quite a faithful visual representation of the Pertwee era, with the strip adopting a far more realistic style than had been the case in *TV Comic*. Cost dictated that the rights to use UNIT, Brigadier Lethbridge-Stewart and the likenesses of Katy Manning and Roger Delgado were not initially obtained; although Delgado's villain, the Master, did appear in the strip later on.

The storylines of some of the earliest *Doctor Who* strips were of very high quality, particularly the second serial, 'Timebenders'. This opened with the Doctor taking a long walk on a windswept moor to think out a problem, and accidentally falling in with a group of Germans who seem to think World War Two is still in progress. A scientist in France, in 1940, has constructed a teleportation device to transport German soldiers across the 21 miles of the English Channel, to enable Hitler's armies to invade England; but no one has realised that the device has also carried them through time to 1971.

Another excellent serial was 'The Celluloid Midas', in which the Doctor is called in to investigate a BBC film unit on location, where the actors and technicians have mysteriously been turned into plastic. The story had overtones of the contemporary 1971 *Doctor Who* TV story, 'Terror of the Autons', which featured aliens who had complete control over anything made of plastic.

Its title was an allusion to the legendary King Midas, whose touch turned everything to gold. But in this case it was a mad scientist, a Professor Midas, who had developed a form of energy that turned people into his plastic slaves. Moreover, this energy was capable of being stored on film, and of affecting anybody who viewed the film; hence the reference to a "celluloid" Midas.

As a joke, 'The Celluloid Midas' strip

The World's First UFO

By an odd quirk of publishing, *Countdown* was launched as an annual, at Christmas 1970, not as a comic. The annual was published during the preceding autumn, several months ahead of the launch of the first issue, which didn't happen until February 1971.

In terms of *UFO*, the annual was even some way ahead of the TV series itself, as the strips featured certain aspects which would be dropped from the *UFO* series before ever it appeared on television.

For instance, the annual used character names that were changed before filming began, with Skydiver's Captain Peter Carlin named in the strips as, variously, Peter Karlin and Jon Karlin; and Moonbase's Lt Gay Ellis was referred to by the character's original name of Space Tracker Paula Harris. Also, Colonel Foster was identified wrongly as Major Foster.

These errors were repeated in subsequent strips throughout the first 12 months, once the comic proper was launched.

petrified members of the film unit whose likenesses were based on members of the *Countdown* editorial staff, including editor Dennis Hooper. Hooper had previously been the art editor on *TV21*, and he was one part of *Countdown*'s inheritance from that source.

Dickensian Who

The following serial, 'Backtime', had the Doctor arrive in Victorian England in 1863 and fall in with a Dickensian waif who was in all material respects the Jack Wild version of the Artful Dodger, from the 1968 film *Oliver*.

A significant fact of the strip was that the Doctor had no regular companion. Unlike the TV series, in *Countdown* he picked up and discarded acquaintances as he went along.

The Doctor absent-mindedly pays a cab fare in 1863 with a 1971 banknote and is arrested for passing "forged" currency. He breaks out of jail and goes on the run with the "Artful Dodger". To try to help his young friend find a new life, he takes him in the Tardis to America. But he forgets that it's 1863, and the Tardis lands them right in the middle of the American Civil War. Shades of the then-recent 1969 television serial, 'The War Games', in which the Troughton Doctor had spent several weeks trapped in the American Civil War zone!

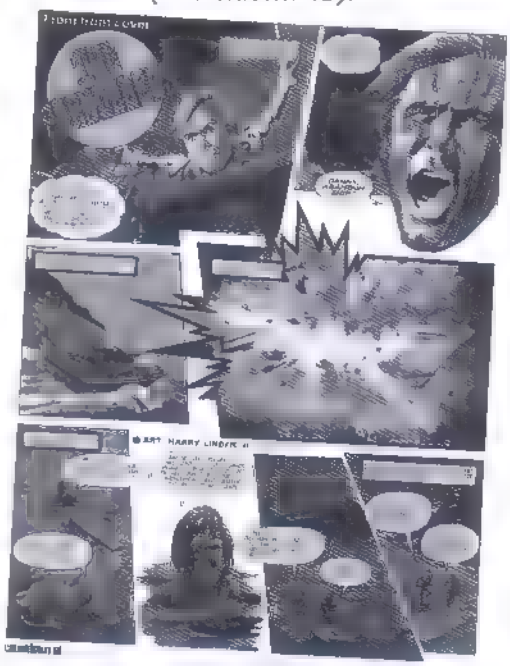
Timeless

Another high quality storyline, "The Eternal Present", had the Doctor arriving in a place where time no longer exists. There is only the eternal present and therefore the Tardis cannot escape, as there is no longer a past or a future for it to travel to.

The Doctor finds a young Englishman called George stranded there, with a primitive time machine of his own, strangely reminiscent of the one featured in the 1960 film, *The Time Machine*. Only at the story's end do we learn that "George" is actually the novelist and inventor Herbert George Wells - who will later write up his experiences in the form of a novel!

A lengthy excursion to the planet Skaro to face the Daleks, with the Doctor assisted by a herd of prehistoric monsters, and entitled 'Planet of the Daleks', pre-dated by two years the *Doctor Who* television story of the same name. And it was partway through this story that *Countdown* was re-launched as *TV Action and Countdown*.

(Above) British comic veteran John Burns shows his talent in this fantastic panel from Countdown *Annual 1972 and (below)* The Persuaders *as illustrated by Harry Lindfield (*Countdown *45).*



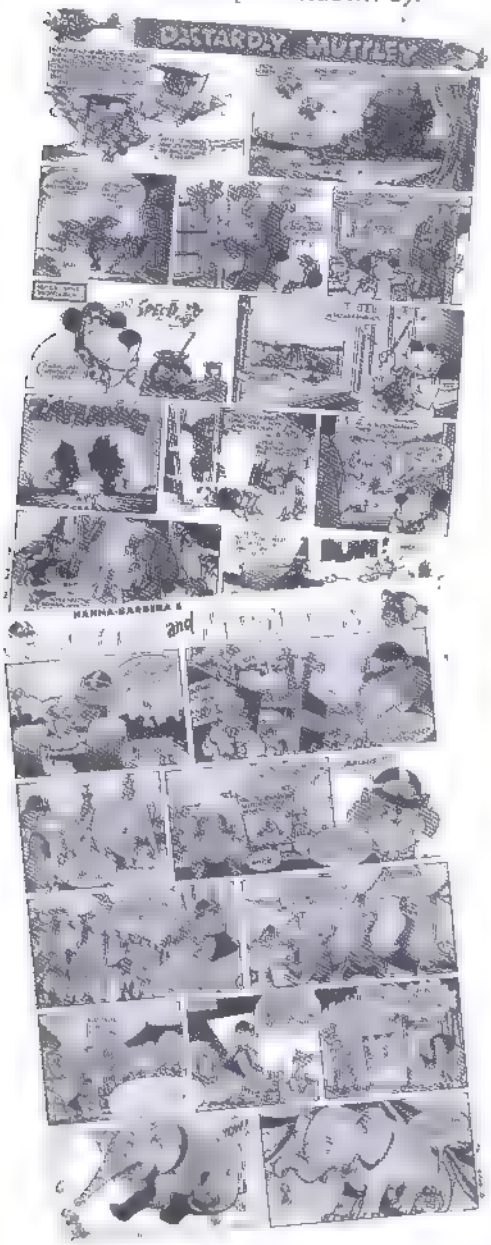
Ger-ry! Ger-ry!

But let's get back to when things were going much better for the title.

Polystyle were able to obtain a licence to feature Gerry Anderson shows in *Countdown*, as *TV21*, by then on its last legs, had relinquished its exclusive hold on those shows.

From its beginning, *Countdown* strongly featured *UFO*, the very latest Gerry Anderson series. For many weeks during the new comic's early months the *UFO* strip occupied the front cover. Strips

(Above) Gerry Heylock shows his style and detail in his rendering of TV classic UFO (Countdown 6).



Such a variety of strips and artwork: (Top) Dastardly & Muttley (Countdown 6, artist unknown). (Centre): Autocat & Motormouse (TV Action 13, artist unknown

based on *Captain Scarlet* and *Thunderbirds* also featured from the outset.

The *UFO* strip was drawn by Gerry Haylock, except for the very first issue, and was printed in colour. The strips were quite short, usually only two pages per issue, but looked beautiful.

Issue one's *UFO* strip introduced all the main SHADO vehicles and bases. It then leapt into a startlingly good five-part story about a journalist who blackmails a SHADO operative into giving him access to SHADO HQ in order to write a feature about the alien threat. He arrives during an emergency – just as an alien also infiltrates the base.

A follow-up strip, 'Too Old at 32', featured Captain Harris: a veteran Interceptor pilot (at the impossibly old age of 32!), whose reaction times almost lead to him failing a simulator test. Resuming duty on Moonbase, he's concerned that his slow reactions may unintentionally let a UFO through. His worst fears come true when his Interceptor suffers a mechanical failure that he's sure will be blamed on him; and the escaping UFO cripples SID, the Space Intruder Detector.

Harris's Interceptor crashes on the Moon, while pursuing a second UFO, and the injured Harris struggles across the lunar surface on foot, trying to reach Moonbase. Foster and Straker search for him in a Moonmobile, and he survives to report the presence of the other UFO. But without SID, Moonbase is an open target.

An indication of the early origins of this story is that the Moonmobiles are referred to as Moonbugs, showing that the writer was using pre-production documents for reference. The attack on SID was possibly inspired by the script (or a story outline) for the televised episode 'The Man Who Came Back', and Harris's struggle to survive on the lunar surface by the episode 'Survival'.

Boss

The story 'The New Boss' drew on many television episodes for its material. Straker's boss, General Henderson, is injured in a UFO attack and temporarily replaced by a new man, General Calper, who is secretly under alien control.

The use of mind control was also utilised in the televised episode 'The Man who Came Back'. The rendezvous at the ruins of a house that has been hit by a UFO recalls the episode 'ESP'. The scenes of Straker driving a racing car are similar to 'Timelash'.

The seven-part serial 'The Force Field' followed and for the first time there were significant departures from the TV format with a storyline based on all-out war between SHADO and the aliens. The aliens establish a forward base on Mars, and launch a massed UFO attack on the Earth. They're shown with a variety of vehicles that they didn't have on television; and SHADO Moonbase suddenly bristles with interplanetary missiles and additional Interceptors.

Whew!

Things get back pretty much to normal the following week, with 'Arctic Affair', where a dogfight over the Arctic icecap results in both an intruding UFO and Sky 1 crashing near an army communications base. The alien pilot finds he can survive even without his spacesuit in the freezing conditions – but both the alien and Captain Carlin are thrown into a cell by the suspicious army commander.

Exposed to the heated environment inside the base, the alien collapses. Carlin is forced to break them both out of the cell in order to ensure the alien's survival. But in the extreme cold on the icepack, Carlin himself can't survive for long.

A major departure from the TV series [illegible] where

Paul Foster is abducted by the aliens and taken to their home planet. This is in part based on the dream sequence of Foster being kidnapped by the aliens in the episode 'Ordeal' but the majority of the story, set on the alien planet, was far-fetched and completely unrelated to the TV series. It also suffered from many continuity errors, conflicting with established facts about the aliens as depicted on television.

Half way through 'The Snatch', artist Gerry Haylock left the strip, having recently taken over the 'Doctor Who' strip instead. He was replaced by Jon Davis, whose more stylised work was not well suited to 'UFO', and was a disappointment after Haylock's really beautiful art.

(Above) Gerry Heylock captures the likeness of actor Jon Pertwee and essence of Dr Who and his arch enemies the Daleks (Countdown 55).

All Change

Haylock made a brief return for two weeks in the next story, 'The Renegade', which probably utilised material commissioned from him prior to 'The Snatch', and was his final contribution to the 'UFO' strip.

Issue 38, where the first part of 'The Renegade' appeared, saw the first step in re-launching *Countdown* with a different format, as the sci-fi strips began to be sidelined. *The Persuaders,* an expensive ITC action series, had made its television debut in September 1971, and was introduced into *Countdown* with a full-colour strip drawn by Harry Lindfield.

This decision precipitated a 'musical chairs' routine, with the artists on the various strips all being reshuffled. Gerry Haylock was moved to the 'Doctor Who' strip to replace Lindfield, relinquishing 'UFO' to Jon Davis and others.

From then on 'UFO' was printed in black-and-white, a policy which lasted for the next 33 weeks, with the strip only returning to colour in issue 71. This was an obvious cost-cutting move, and suggests the comic was already experiencing those financial difficulties that would lead to a more radical re-launch four months later.

Beginning with 'The Renegade' the 'UFO' strip expanded from two to six pages each week, albeit in black-and-white. The former policy of running 'UFO' as a serial, with cliff-hanger endings each week and multi-part plots lasting six weeks, was abandoned. The new six-page format enabled a complete story to be presented in each issue but at the cost of reducing the story content by half, from twelve pages (spread over six weeks) down to just six pages all-told.

There was now no permanent writer on the strip, resulting in storylines of variable quality and causing the previously established continuity to fall apart. The more limited space for story development forced the abandonment of SHADO's secret status. Now, Mobiles were regularly tearing about the countryside in broad daylight. Yet, on some occasions, the stories had the aliens using SHADO's secret nature to claim that SHADO operatives were actually foreign agents. Inconsistencies of this type added to the strip's uneven quality.

In the SHADOs

If the writers were unclear about the format, so too were the artists. They were now being rotated, in order to produce the necessary six-pages a week. Without the restraining influence of a TV budget a much more futuristic 1980 began to be randomly depicted, with some of the new artists apparently under the misconception that *TV21* technology was part of the series.

With the final issue of 1971, number 46, cover dated December 31st, the comic was re-titled *Countdown for TV Action*, emphasising its new direction, as various action series replaced the original science fiction strips.

Countdown in effect ceased three months later at issue 58, with a further title change to *TV Action and Countdown*, and the loss of the glossy paper on which it had so far been printed -- although the issue numbering from *Countdown* was retained.

(Above): Tightrope (TV Action 73, art by Stanley Houghton).

A further change of title a year later, to simply TV Action, *marked yet another relaunch, this time with an emphasis on American shows such as* Hawaii Five-0.

This relaunch was not a success either, however, and TV Action *merged into the much more juvenile* TV Comic *after 130 issues.* ●

Let us know what you think about British comics, Crikey!*, our features (our written ones, not our faces!) and anything else that might* Crikey! *readers. Our address is:*
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Um letters!

Um Crikey!

I tend to hoard rather than collect. I buy and keep comics I like but I'm not concerned if I have gaps in a run. I just have a few boxes of comics, mainly humour, stashed away in fitted wardrobes in our spare room. It keeps them safe and out of sight. It's not that my wife Jill is ashamed of them, it's just that they can look untidy.

Anyway, what I wanted to ask is this. I have several copies of the 1970s version of *Knockout*. It was launched in 1971 and featured some great characters and artwork. Not all of them were humourous. 'The Super Seven' was a great adventure strip. But anyway, was this a relaunch of the *Knockout* comic from previous years that I've seen mentions in various places?

Pete Timms
Barnsley

Pete – Knockout *was not a relaunch. It was a title that had passed over from the previous publishers (Amalgamated Press/Fleetway) in a convoluted set of deals that ended up with IPC Magazines having the rights by the early 70s.*

If you want more on that, go and check out Steve Holland's article in Crikey! *2.*

I was a big fan of Knockout for about a month. After reading four or five issues I suddenly had the feeling that I was more or less reading the same stories over and over again. So maybe just having sample copies rather than full runs is the best way to 'collect' these comics.

Um Crikey!

Perhaps I'd better introduce myself (Cue the James Bond theme). The name is Robson - Gordon Robson, and for about fifteen years I was a full-time freelance comic contributor (mainly as a letterer, but also sometimes an artist), working for companies such as IPC/Fleetway, Marvel UK and US, Redan, The Black Library and Usborne books. In fact, just about the only main British company I've not been involved with during my time is DC Thomson.

My full-time career came to an end about six or seven years ago, due mainly to the fact that there is no longer a comics industry to speak of in this country.

When I freelanced for IPC/Fleetway, for example, they had titles like *2000AD*, *The Magazine*, *Dice Man*, *Crisis*, *Revolver*, *Lawman of the Future*, *Wildcat*, *Eagle*, *Battle-Action Force*, *Tiger*, *Roy of the Rovers*, *Whizzer & Chips*, *Buster*, *Wow*, *Oink*, *Nipper* – not to mention comics libraries, summer specials and annuals.

Of course, not all these titles were published simultaneously. Some overlapped and some came in between. The point is, there was always something on the go.

So what of that lot today? *2000AD* is the only weekly comic of its kind left on the shelves (now owned by a games company called Rebellion - the comic, that is - not the shelves) and The Magazine is a half-reprint monthly publication.

As far as the comic companies go, there's no longer a 'Big Two' - in fact, there's not even a 'Big One' - as even the once-mighty DC Thomson comic empire is in decline. *The Beano* and *The Dandy* are the only surviving weeklies from their once vast stable of titles which at one time included *Topper*, *Beezer*, *Crunch*, *Spike*, *Buddy*, *Nutty*, *Plug*, *Buzz*, *Mandy*, *Judy*, *Bunty* and many, many more.

The Dandy's circulation has declined so alarmingly in recent years that it's been relaunched as a 21st century 'yoof'-style magazine, bearing little resemblance to the traditional comic-paper that you or I read as children (and in my case, I blush to admit, as an adult also).

Which brings me to my main point.

In re-lauching *The Dandy*, DC Thomson has, I believe, overlooked an important factor in the longevity of their two favourite titles - to wit: they've lasted so long because, essentially, they haven't changed too much (or, at least, any changes have been so gradual as to be imperceptible).

They remained immediately recognisable as the comics which many parents read as kids, and, out of a sense of nostalgia, parents would then purchase them for their own children until said offspring acquired the habit of buying them for themselves. Then, in the fullness of time, the cycle would begin anew.

It will be interesting to see if this will still happen to the same degree now that the comic has been forcibly mutated into a radically different product that up-and-coming-mums and dads will scarcely recognise. It now has to stand on its own merits,

without the safety net of nostalgic parents fondly 'passing the baton' to their children. This act of generational perpetuation can no longer be taken for granted. Dan must really be feeling desperate as he looks out from his new face and sees what's happening around him.

Another factor in the success of DC Thomson publications was that they were relatively inexpensive. The choice between a comic and a bar of chocolate was sometimes a major decision. But at least they were about the same price and you could afford one or the other.

Value for money? Let's make a little comparison here, just for fun.

The last issue of the old style *Dandy* comic cost 70p and had 32 pages. Of those, 25 had comic strip, but did not fill the full page on five of them, so it works out at 23 and a bit pages of strips, one puzzle page and seven pages of adverts, two of which are 'in-house'. Their was also almost a full page 'huge news inside' ad on the cover, along with the logo. Older readers will perhaps remember that this usually heralded the 'trump of doom' for their favourite title.

So, does it in this instance?

Well the new *Dandy Magazine* costs £1.20 (99p introductory price) and has 44 pages. This consists of 26 pages of strips, nine-and-a-half pages of ads (five in-house), leaving seven-and-a-half pages comprising a contents page, a two-page poster, a joke page, one-and-a-half pages of letters, two pages of introductions to the (fictitious) Dandy Staff (Office hours) and the cover.

A contents page?

In a comic? (A comic posing as a magazine, I grant you). The term 'space-filler' springs to mind, as it does in response to the Office Hours and poster pages. Give the readers some more strips to read for goodness sake, and get rid of the unnecessary stuff by cutting down to 40 pages and lowering the price.

Don't know about you, but I buy comics to read comic strips, not contents pages and 'filler' material. Do you realise, *Dandy* reader, that you're now paying 50p more per week (almost double) for just over two-and-a-half more pages of actual comic strip content?

C'mon DC Thomson, get rid of the padding and give us some substance for our shekels.

Gordon Robson,
Internet.

You've opened up a great debate, Gordon and one I would like to get Crikey! *readers involved in. What do people think about what Gordon has to say?*

I worked in British mainstream comics as a writer, editor and publisher. I was there at the start of the licensed comics revolution of the early 80s when suddenly licensed comics such as My Little Pony *and* Masters of the Universe *could sell between 80 and 85% of a print-run of around 160,000 copies. And at a higher cover price than traditional comics. What's more, they tended to be on better paper, often in colour and with more free gifts than regular titles. At a time when older readers were giving up comics in favour of magazines and games, licensed comics were seen as the saviour of the comic industry.*

For titles such as Transformers, Carebears *and* Disney Comic *it didn't matter where they were on sale and increasingly they were to be sold in supermarkets and other chains.*

And when barcodes and EPOS (electronic point of sale) came along it meant that comics were treated just like any other fashion item. You were only as good as last week's sale.

Supermarkets took up an increasing amount of comic sales and newsagents couldn't be bothered to keep up with the constant launch and cancellation of titles.

And Britain didn't really have a market for single character comics. Our strength was the anthology title. As a character's popularity waned, others would take their place and the comic would continue.

Now things appear to be glum for readers of adventure, humour, SF, war, crime and every other genre. So what's to be done? Albums, graphic novels and manga might be a way forward. But what do you think?

Um Crikey!

I seem to remember a comic from the 1980s called *Starblazer*. It was a pocket-sized comic (like *Commando*) and featured some on-going characters and lots of one-off stories. I'd love to know more about it.

Mark Watts,
Cardiff.

Starblazer *ran from 1979 to 1991 and was responsible for being into the business many new writers – step forward John Smith and Grant Morrison (as well as ye* Crikey! *editor). We intend to cover this seminal magazine in some detail in a future issue (see our short article on page 10 of this issue). Whilst largely ignored at the time, it has had a profound impact of the development of comics in the UK. Beginning life as a* Star Wars *inspired space opera comic it developed it's own sense of storytelling and roster of characters.*

More in a later issue.

Um Crikey!

I enjoyed *Crikey!* 2 very much. It still comes across a bit bitsy for me, through. A case in point is the football feature (Phew! What a Scorcher! – ed). Just as it gets going, it stops. Same with the war comic feature (*'Last Man Standing'* – ed).

Can we have more substantial pieces mixed in with the shorter ones.

You'll be pleased to see a subscription cheque enclosed, so you can tell I'll still a happy customer.

Dave Roberts,
Liverpool.

*One of the things we went for with issues one and two was to ensure that we had a good variety of content. A bit like the anthology comics of old. Now that we have established ourselves we are including longer pieces where they need the space. To be fair, the features you mentioned were both devoted to a single title (*Scorcher *and* Victor*) and were written as overviews. But point taken.*

Crikey!

During the war children were told to empty their plate because men had died in the Atlantic in order to put food on the table. That attitude persisted in the post war period when food was still rationed and even now, despite the damage to my waistline, I can't leave a meal unfinished.

In his wittty review of the post war years - *The Man Who Saved Britain* - Simon Winder highlights a telling passage from the first ever James Bond book. In *Casino Royale* (1953), when Ian Fleming wanted to portray 007 indulging in the height of privileged chic; he has Bond eating an avocado pear in a northern French costal resort.

"The sense of the exotic is won with a mere oily tropical fruit on the windswept Channel coast," says Winder. An accurate portrayal of what was way out of reach for Joe Public in the years of austerity.

One side effect from the scarcity of all but basic foods was the institution of the treat. In these days of instant gratification it must be well-neigh impossible to give a child a true treat.

The Fleetway comics of the 1950s had a similar, simple view of what it meant to be given a treat. The ultimate reward for our comic chums was to be given a slap up feed. This would frequently occur at the Cafe Splendeed or the Hotel de Posh. As in *Casino Royale* there's a bit of French to add class. On the table would be chickens, hams, and cream cakes; together with wobbly jellies and exotic fruit, with lashings of 'champop' in an ice bucket.

Enough food to feed a family of four for a month and still have change for the Saturday morning flicks!

With a favourite comic in his possession, the young reader didn't have to wait for festive occasions, they could enjoy the sight of a treat almost every week: lounging by the sea front with monster knickerbocker glories.

Being rewarded with a Christmas hamper for some simple act of kindness, by an incognito millionaire.

Or out in the country with a picnic spread that must have taken a pantechnicon to transport - and no wasps, unless they were germane to the plot.

Outside the world of the treat and the slap up feed, everyday fare centred on pies and this is what the comic characters ate as well. The pies would come hot from the oven and in need of cooling. Never learning by experience, the cook would place the steaming dish by an open street front window. Whether any rogue ever stole a hot pie off a window sill in real life I somehow doubt, but it happened regularly in the comics.

To cries of, "Come back here, you pesky pie pincher!" some crafty cove with a broken nose and a five o'clock shadow, would leg it down the street with today's dinner. The thief never got away with it, and if the pie got damaged there'd always be some reason why a rich philanthropist would want to replace it with a bigger one, or even with a slap up feed.

As well as pies, common folk in the comics are frequently seen enjoying a pile of mashed potato with sausages stuck in it or a Desperate Dan pie with a pair of horns holding up the crust.

The ultimate slap up feed was the Christmas dinner. A groaning board of Dickensian proportions was the tradition for the last frame of stories in that special edition with the snow across the title. As they raised their glasses of pop and pulled their crackers, the characters would look out of the frame and wish their readers a Merry Christmas.

Ray Aspden
Droitwich

Regular writer and Crikey! *Chum Tom Sweetman is preparing an article for a future issue on the twin topics of crime and punishment in the comics. It seems it was always a choice between a slap and a slap up meal!*

Um Crikey!

The annuals article in issue three is about the first time you have talked about prices. Is this something you want to do more of? At the moment prices are a bit hit and miss with UK comics.

David Green
Peterborough

If the writers include details of prices we will most likely leave it in. We don't see ourselves as a price guide. You're the first person to ask, David so I'm not sure how much of a demand there is for pricing information.

That's it for this time round. Come back soon and see what we have in issue five. Crikey!
Ye Editor -- Brian

Crikey!

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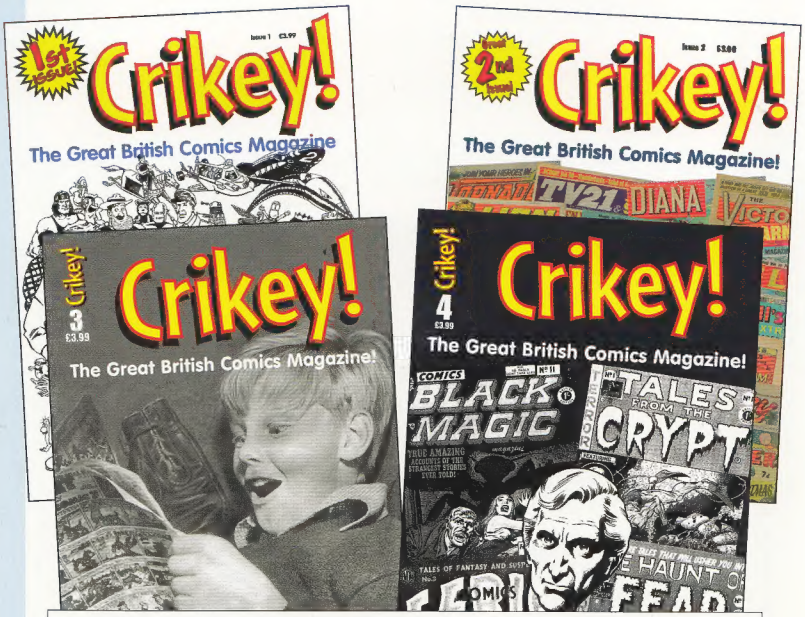

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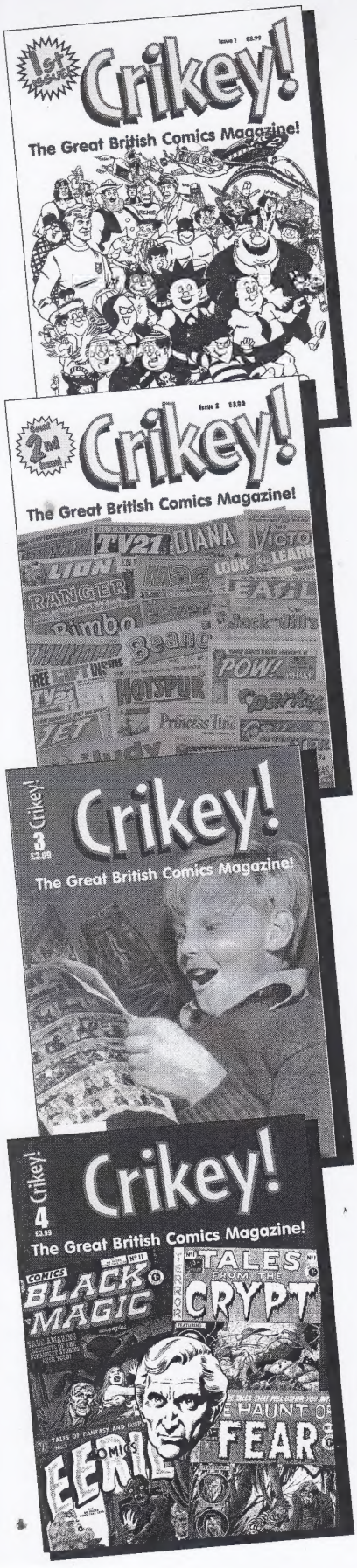

Crikey!

The Great British Comics Magazine!

Um *Crikey!* Chum,

Enclosed with this letter is your last pre-paid subscription copy of *Crikey!* Magazine. I want to thank you for your support over the past year – without subscribers we would have a tough job keeping the magazine going at the quality we want.

When we began *Crikey!* was little more than three guys who wanted to read about British comics. We couldn't find a British comics fanzine magazine anywhere and so we (bravely/naively – delete as applicable) decided to do our own. The gamble for us was that once the magazine was out, other people would get involved. Between issues one and four we added literally dozens of writers and advisors to our team and that's helped to move *Crikey!* in the right direction as new writers widened the *Crikey!* brief to include all British comic strips (and not just '50s to '70s, as it was when we began).

We want to make *Crikey!* the best British comics magazine ever. We started with a lot of pluses on our side; all three *Crikey!* Chums have worked professionally in British comics – I myself was Managing Editor at London Editions, International Project Co-ordinator at Fleetway Editions and joint-MD of Newsstand Services and Just Publications. Glenn is a professional designer, cartoonist and writer with a couple of published books to his name. Tom is a seasoned comics scriptwriter. And we have big collections.

Over the year we have welcomed unknown, fan-favourites and celebrity writers to our pages (check out Dave Gibbons' piece in this issue). Our connections are growing and we have even assembled a team of fact-checkers to have a look at our articles and weed out the errors.

As our sales have climbed, we looked to find ways to reward subscribers. Our first idea was to provide occasional free gifts (our Thunderclapper from issue two, for instance). We will continue to find free gifts for the subscriber-only copies – about once every second or third issue.

We also looked for ways to reduce the cost of a subscription as soon as we could. When we moved to a bi-monthly schedule it allowed us to give six issues for the price of five – £3.32 an issue and still including free postage and packing. Our next big target is to get at least a colour section – ideally colour throughout. It all depends on sales.

Have a look at your four issues so far. Look at the range of stuff we have covered. The constant improvements we have made. Our growing roster of contributors. If you like what we have done so far, please re-subscribe. Details are inside *Crikey!*

A *Crikey!* subscription would also make a Great Easter present for someone...

Once again, thanks for being there in Year One.

Brian M Clarke
Um Editor